JANUARY 2001

NEA Today

The Magazine of the National Education Association

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See page 44 for details

High Stakes or High Standards?

NEA member Brian LeCloux knows the difference between unfair tests and real accountability.

See page 8

NEA Today

january 2001

Volume 19 • Number 4

Paul Tople

COVER STORY

High Stakes or High Standards?

page 8

Ohio second grade teacher Theresa Barbato has her students write in their journals—even though that type of writing won't be tested on the state's mandated high-stakes exam at the end of the school year.

Cover photo by David R. Barnes

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TAMING THE TIGER

Once again, NEA maintains the status quo in regards to special education. Taming the Tiger, Ha! We've got the tiger by the tail and it is ready to come back and bite us.

NEA should serve teachers and students by ferociously fighting against all the paperwork and getting the federal government to contribute their fair share of funding.

I have 38 students who require assessment, IEPs, and meetings that take up a *minimum* of three hours each. If you do the math and compare it to the amount of time I have available to have student contact, it is easy to see that special education talks more about specifically designed instruction than actually delivers it. Special education hurts more than it helps!

Torree Abrams
Bend, Oregon

I read "Taming the Paper Tiger" with great interest. Not being a special education teacher, I cannot fully appreciate the paperwork burden these teachers face.

However, being a high school language arts teacher, I would hope that the attention of the NEA and researchers would also be paid to the overwhelming burden of student grading (i.e., paperwork) that falls on language arts teachers.

Special education teachers in my high school have limited class sizes and an additional prep hour.

No such provisions exist for me or my department colleagues, who face five classes daily of anywhere from 25 to 33 students each.

The paperwork generated by these class sizes creates a daunting workload for the English teacher who cares enough to do the job right.

As an example, the one senior research paper assignment in my 12th grade English class last year took me 35 hours to correct—almost an additional week of work.

This was, of course, in addition to my regular teaching hours and duties with no additional compensation or recognition.

I am all for helping teachers to do their jobs more effectively. All teachers' workloads should receive the same scrutiny advocated for special education teachers in your article. But until we also consider the grading workload of English teachers who are themselves finding paperwork "devouring [their] time and energy," we may risk shortchanging the professionalism of, and fairness toward, language arts teachers.

Ultimately, we may be pushing dedicated teachers out of the classroom.

After all, "the last thing we want to do is shortchange our kids."

Timothy Donahue
Royal Oak, Michigan

REVISITING HOMEWORK

As a 30-year teacher, now retired, I thought Karolyn Berkman wrote a most interesting letter (November) about homework.

My comment is, if the majority of the students are not doing the homework, why are teachers still assigning it? If it isn't working, for heaven's sake, stop! Do something else! If the day is too short, then lengthen it, or break up the time in a different pattern.

As soon as you assign homework to students where there isn't a lot of support by the parents, you have told the class in essence, "Some of you will succeed, because your parents will see that you have the time and place to work on lessons. The rest of you might just as well quit trying to learn, because you're just not going to make it!"

When I taught English to seventh graders, I didn't require homework. We met one hour each day, and with proper classroom management we accomplished all I was supposed to.

I will just add that I admire Karolyn Berkman immensely. I could never be a substitute. I consider that job to be about as dangerous as going into a cage of lions without a whip!

Myron Richards
Kirkland, Washington

Randall Enos

ALL ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY

I was infuriated when I read the responses to the question of what to do when kids are sick at school. What happened to parental responsibility?

I find it hard to believe that in this age, when virtually every adult has a telephone, cell phone, pager, E-mail, or all of the above, a parent could not be reached unless, of course, they did not want to be reached.

This is tantamount to neglect and these parents need to be told that. I know that people are quick to jump to conclusions that it's only the kids in the lower socio-economic strata that are affected by this and therefore it's a problem easily ignored.

However, in my 20 years of teaching at both ends of the economic spectrum, it is the wealthy parents who willingly put their children on the back burner if it means that their keeping up with the millionaire lifestyle might be interrupted. Often, that means that even the nanny of the week would rather go shopping than pick up a sick child.

Why do teachers continue to be the whipping posts for parents and school administrators who should be forced to take ownership of this issue? Start taking these students to the principal's office and insist on her/him calling the parents and threatening Child Protective intervention if they won't live up to their parental responsibilities.

Call the superintendent *every time* it happens and maybe, eventually, they will live up to their responsibilities and ensure that there is a place for sick kids to be until someone picks them up. It will take awhile, but will be worth it eventually. The only other alternative is to continue to do extra laundry and be seen as a doormat to irresponsible parents, principals, and district administration.

After all, you're doing their jobs for them already.

LeAnn Traylor
Snoqualmie, Washington

STUDENT GRADERS

In answer to "Don't Use Students to Grade Classmates' Work," (Rights Watch, November):

There are many ways to improve teacher quality. One is for teachers to grade students' papers. Never call upon children to grade each other's work. Of course, peer grading is embarrassing, but grading one's own papers is a practice that can be used to a teacher's advantage.

Grading students' papers allows the educator to discover why and where specific children fail. Tests are not only given to determine grades, they help teachers to know how and where they have fallen short of their teaching goals.

Geraldine Hilton
Bloomfield, New Jersey

NICE START

As a member of NEA for 50 years I want to tell you that I like the vision and philosophy of the new NEA executive director, John Wilson. (Interview, November) He sounds like a man with down-to-earth common sense and the wherewithal to advance and promote the well being of children and teachers.

James Todd
Canton, New York

ELECTION REVISITED

I passed the West Palm Beach County ballot around to my teenage students. Not one of them had any trouble reading the ballot correctly. I know we have especially bright kids here in Pine City. I am thinking of sending them as tutors to West Palm Beach County before the next election. After 15,000 mismarked ballots in 1996 and 19,000 mismarked in 2000, these voters need remedial help.

Jim Hanson
Pine City, Florida

By the time this gets printed, the election will be over, but whatever the outcome, I'm glad to see that our NEA leadership came out in support of the only pro-public educational candidate, Al Gore.

A lot of people who don't agree with what the NEA stands for don't

take the time or make the effort to represent themselves in our organization. They don't attend the NEA Representative Assembly to see what this Association has done for teachers nationwide.

One of the greatest things liberalism has done is to create a public education system for all, and, no matter who wins the election, I expect that the NEA will always be one of the few national organizations to both represent teachers and be a constant force in improving our profession.

Rich Valentini,
Yuba City, California

NOT IN THIS SPACE

I am very disappointed that NEA supports the teaching of homosexuality in the classroom.

I do believe that teachers should teach acceptance of all people regardless of their differences, but I do not believe that a public school classroom is the place for such topics as homosexuality, especially when many people consider this topic a moral issue.

If teachers are spending time on a controversial topic, then they are neglecting their academic responsibilities. The home is a better setting to discuss homosexuality.

I am ashamed that my hard-earned money goes to support this teaching in public schools.

T. Moore
Shelby, Alabama

FINE WORK

I look forward to the monthly arrival of my *NEA Today*. It keeps me abreast of what is happening in the field of education throughout the nation, informs me of current political issues, and provides ideas and resources for my use in the classroom.

I especially enjoy the review and recommendations found in the Web Winners section. I sit down at my computer and explore each of the sites. I always find a couple of new sites to introduce to my students or find resources for myself. Thank you for a practical, up-to-date, professional magazine.

Becky Cameron
Tustin, California

Let's Talk

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of five ways:

- By mail: Write to Letters, NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- Through the Web: Go to www.nea.org/neatoday and click on "Submit a Letter to the Editor"
- By E-mail: Write to neatoday@nea.org
- By Fax: 202/822-7206
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Letters are edited for length and clarity.

COMPETENT BOARDS

After reading Simone Gobel's opinion on "Should candidates for Congress be required to pass competency tests?" (Debate, October), I came up with still further questions.

I understand why we require teachers to be competent. I understand why we require doctors to be competent. I understand why we require school bus drivers to be competent. But the question needs to be applied, not only to Congress, but also to school board members. Shouldn't school boards be staffed with competent people?

Shouldn't they be required to think, reason through problems, and be versed in financial and educational matters, as well as building maintenance? I think so.

And shouldn't voters be competent? Shouldn't voters be required to pass a competency test to show that they are intelligent enough to look at both sides of a question, and then make rational decisions?

Ed Morrison
Karns City, Pennsylvania

REMEMBER NURSES

In "Take A Shot At Getting Immigrant Students Vaccinated" (Health and Fitness, October), one major resource was omitted: *the school nurse.*

You suggested that educators might fear the health of immigrant students. Not in my district. I use precautions to reduce any risk of disease transmission whether varicella (chicken pox), HIV, or pediculosis (head lice).

Rosemary Akin
Yarmouth, Massachusetts

USING STUDENTS

Sandi Ortiz Ishii's picture on the cover of the October issue, along with the headline "Helping Kids At the Ballot Box," made me wonder just what Ishii wanted her students to achieve at the ballot box, since they are unable to vote. Then I realized that she was aiming at their parents, who could!

I think it is unethical for teachers to involve their students in politics!

Donalda Alder
Garden Grove, California

WHO SHOULD PAY?

I was appalled at the (October) letter by Diana Hammermeister. Although she teaches in a public school, this teacher graduated from a religious high school and stated, "I still do not understand why my parents had to pay school taxes for services they would not use."

It's time we realized that we are all dependent on each other. Sometimes we pay taxes for the good of others.

Lynda Bauckham
Portage, Michigan

President's Viewpoint

BY BOB CHASE

Test Tosterone

At the risk of getting run over by the testing juggernaut, I take issue with the abuses and excesses.

Every election, it seems, politicians come up with one or two "get tough" issues. In years past, they talked tough about drugs, deadbeat dads, and the death penalty. But campaign 2000 brought something new. A surprising number of politicians—Democrats and Republicans alike—talked tough about testing.

Their macho message was simple, if not simplistic: Testing will force students to shape up. Testing will put steel in our schools. Testing equals accountability.

At the risk of getting run over by this testing juggernaut, I'd like to raise several urgent issues. I have a duty to raise these issues because I am an outspoken advocate of standards-based reform—and because, I fear, public support for this reform is jeopardized by abuses and excesses involving high-stakes tests.

Let me be very clear, I favor testing. Valid, reliable tests yield rich data about students' strengths and weaknesses. We need such data in order to target interventions toward kids who need help.

But in a growing number of states, tests are being used for punitive purposes. Students are being denied promotion or graduation—often in an arbitrary, inflexible manner—based on a single test.

This is playing with fire. It is "accountability" by blunt instrument. And I'm against it.

As a matter of fairness and accuracy, tests should be one component of a multifaceted approach to assessing a child's progress.

As a matter of fairness and accuracy, tests should be one component of a multifaceted approach to assessing a child's progress. Every teacher—and every parent—knows that some kids are natural test takers, and some kids are not. With so much at stake in a child's life, assessments should not be based on a single snapshot or a single instrument.

More broadly, as educators we must not allow the tests to swallow the schools. In a growing number of states, is seems as though the tests are driving everything. They are driving curriculum. They are driving promotion and graduation decisions. They are driving—and distorting—the entire classroom experience of teachers and students.

Increasingly, teachers have no choice but to "teach to the test." In some states, schools spend entire days teaching students how to take the test—in other words, the techniques and tricks necessary to do well on the test.

And the corollary of "teaching to the test" is this: if it's not on the test, it doesn't get taught. In many places, courses such as civics, physical education, and art are being eliminated, as are school plays, classroom discussions, and other activities that enrich and enliven the school experience.

This is a fundamental mistake. There are important things we should be teaching that cannot be measured by tests. In addition, I believe deeply in preserving the creativity and discretion of skilled teachers. I'm worried that these things are being squeezed out systematically by our growing obsession with testing.

As states and school districts design accountability systems, they should bear in mind the words that Albert Einstein displayed prominently in his Princeton office. "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

Politicians will continue to talk tough about tests. But as educators, we have a professional responsibility to talk back. We must insist on standards and tests that aim to challenge children, not terrorize them. That is our high-stakes test.

Comments? E-mail Bob Chase at BobChase@nea.org.

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It's Okay To Read, at Any Age

A Kansas high school teacher lets her students read what they want to read.

BY LORI STRATTON

Standing in line at a local store, I felt a tap and turned to gaze up at a vaguely familiar-looking young man with bright red hair.

"Nick?" I asked, tentatively.

"Hey, Ms. Stratton, what's up?"

Nick told me that he was getting ready to leave for his final semester at Johnson County Community College. Then he would transfer to the University of Kansas in the fall. A slow smile spread across his face.

"You know, I've made the dean's honor roll three semesters in a row."

I swallowed past the sudden lump in my throat, treasuring this moment.

"That's great Nick," I said as he loped out the door.

Flash back two and a half years. It's early September and it's hot. I face a room of 30 seniors who look as though they're about ready to have multiple root canals instead of spending one class period in senior English. I've just returned from maternity leave after having my third child; I'm sleep-deprived and hormonally unbalanced. I take a deep breath and begin.

"We're going to have reading time," I say, "twenty minutes a day. You can choose your own books, but you have to read."

A chorus of groans fills the room. "No offense or anything," Nick pipes up, "but I've never read a whole book in my entire life, and I'm not going to read one this year."

Undaunted and with a sense of purpose (or desperation), I led my class to the library to choose books. Many picked the shortest one they could find—if it had pictures, even better. But, much to my surprise, many didn't choose. They asked my advice or questioned the librarian.

These students read book jackets and looked at the first few pages. Some of them, I clung to the thought, seemed even excited about the chance to read.

And so was born the most successful teaching practice I have yet tried during my 10-year career: I let the students read the books they wanted to read during class time.

This idea may not sound very earth shattering, and primary instructors may think it's ridiculous.

But we as high school English teachers are not, for the most part, reading experts. Put a 17-year-old with a seventh grade reading level in our English class and what do we do?

I first thought about the reading in class idea around the time that my oldest child was entering that magical first grade year when most children unlock the secret to decoding words.

Most of the first graders were allowed to read what they wanted to read. Why, I thought, couldn't this work with my high school students?

I began to immerse myself in learning about the teaching of reading. I took classes and workshops and devoured every article about reading.

Marcus Stratton

High school English teacher Lori Stratton believes regular reading in class can bring the joy of good books back for older students.

Most of what I learned was about helping young students read.

Then, on that hot day a couple years ago, I decided to forge ahead with letting students read books of their own choice during class.

And that approach worked better than I'd ever imagined. Not only did Nick, my reluctant reader, finish a book (Jay Bennett's *Skeleton Man*), he finished about eight others during the year as well.

I've learned many things since that first year of setting aside 20 minutes of daily "reading time."

For one, students enter my classroom with preconceived notions about reading that have to be addressed. So I now start out the year talking about children's books. We reminisce together about our favorite stories from childhood, the ones we memorized and wanted to hear every night before going to bed.

We talk about the time our third grade teacher read *Where the Red Fern Grows* out loud during class, and everyone, including the teacher, cried. We remember, with smiles and laughs, the love affair we had with books when we were children.

I've also learned how important it is for me to read my own book as my students read one of theirs. Occasionally, I'll read aloud a passage for the students, and I've found that this encourages students to do the same when they discuss their books.

I understand and respect those who question the time spent on reading. I felt the same way.

But my classroom has been transformed by something as simple as letting the students read for fun. We still manage to get through the required curriculum every year, and test results show their reading comprehension level is rising.

Of course, not all students immediately take to reading, despite my best efforts. Some resist—strongly.

My response to these students is to just smile—remembering Nick—and say, "Let's just try it and see how it goes." ✔

Lori Stratton teaches at Wamego (Kansas) High School. She can be reached at msphoto@wamego.net.

If you read the fine print on the bottom of page 2, you know that, each year, about four of your dues dollars are earmarked for *NEA Today*. How's that money spent?

The major expenses for publishing *NEA Today* are paper, printing, and postage.

Other costs are also involved, of course, everything from staff salaries to purchases of photos and illustrations, but the largest expenditures by far go to these three core expenses.

Bill Fischer
editor

It's a constant battle to hold these three expenses in check and, at the same time, ensure that you receive a good-looking, readable publication on time, every month.

Each year, we buy more than 6 *million* pounds of paper. That's enough to give us some bargaining clout with paper merchants.

Our production coordinator, Ann Marie Bohan, keeps a keen eye on the paper market, and she nails down multi-year agreements whenever paper prices are right.

We also watch printing costs carefully. *NEA Today* is printed on rotogravure presses, a very economical, yet high-quality method of printing large-circulation, four-color publications like the *Parade* you see inserted in your Sunday newspaper.

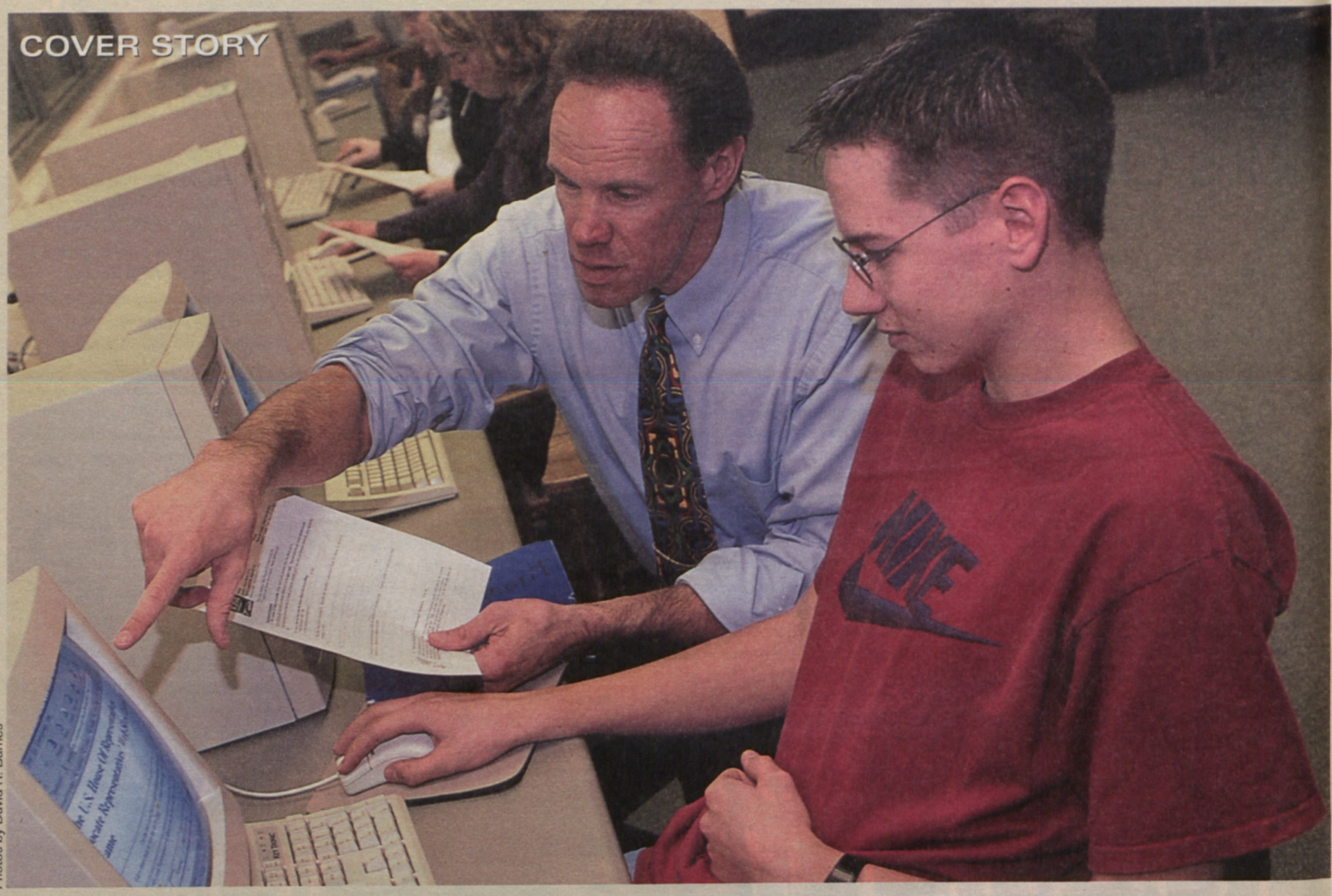
Roto presses save both money—and trees—by reducing waste in the printing process.

Our third key expense, postage, is also our largest expense and the toughest to control. The Post Office used to heavily subsidize mailing costs for newspapers and magazines, under the thinking that democracy demands the widest possible circulation of ideas and information.

That lofty goal, unfortunately, is no longer driving postal rate decisions. Nonprofit publications like ours have just been hit with another hefty rate increase.

But that hike won't stop us from meeting *our* goal: Putting a quality publication in your mailbox eight times a year.

Bill Fischer



Photos by David R. Barnes

Can the Standards Movement Be Saved?

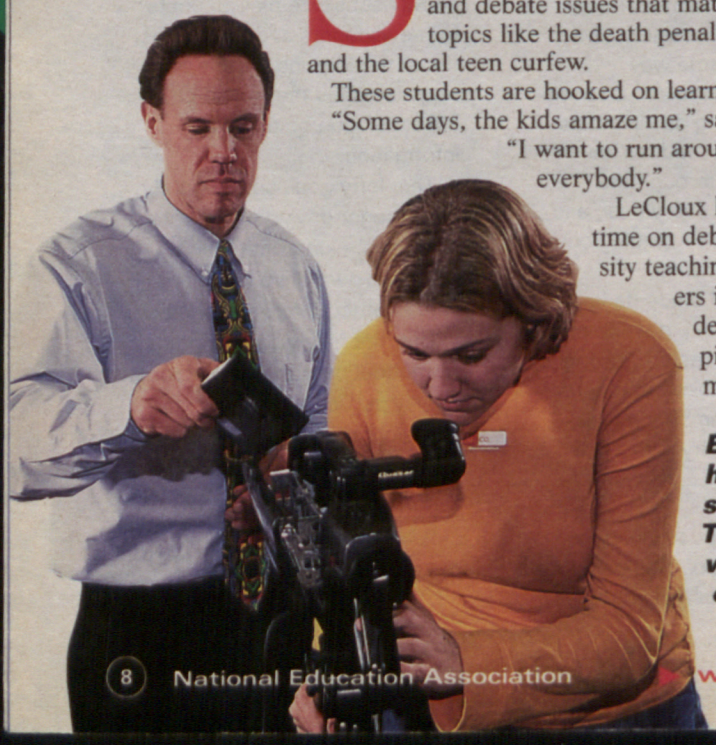
Teachers are finding that high-stakes testing is too often undermining learning.

Social studies teacher Brian LeCloux believes in high standards—and knows how to inspire his students to reach them. In his government classes at Wisconsin's Richland Center High, LeCloux has students research and debate issues that matter to them, hot-button topics like the death penalty, gun control, abortion, and the local teen curfew.

These students are hooked on learning.

"Some days, the kids amaze me," says this six-year teacher. "I want to run around the building and tell everybody."

LeCloux has the freedom to spend time on debates and other high-intensity teaching strategies because teachers in Wisconsin don't have to devote endless hours prepping anxious students for mandated, high-stakes tests.



Brian LeCloux knows how to stretch students' minds. To be accountable, he wants to put his classroom on cable.

In 1999, Wisconsin repealed its high-stakes test mandate, after a parent-led campaign supported by the NEA state affiliate, the Wisconsin Education Association Council.

But Wisconsin is bucking a national trend. Half of the states so far have adopted high-stakes tests that will decide whether students can graduate. In some states, schools can be closed if scores are low.

Wisconsin will still have a state test, but each district will set its own graduation requirements. In Richland Center, LeCloux will be on the committee that develops the standards.

LeCloux is proud of what he's been able to achieve, and he's eager for parents to know what happens in his classes. He plans to videotape his student debates for later broadcast on cable.

"I'd like to see classroom videos announced in the local paper," he says. "Instead of just saying there's a two-point change in SAT scores, I'd like them to say there's a new social studies classroom tape. That would be real accountability."

Ohio, by contrast, seems to define accountability strictly by high-stakes tests. Next year, Ohio is scheduled to introduce a "fourth grade guarantee," under which children will have to pass a state reading test to be promoted to fifth grade.

NEA member Karen Sternberg, a reading specialist in the Cincinnati suburb of Woodland, says this test doesn't guarantee good reading. In fact, she says, it will lead students to read less.

"The children see reading as a testing situation." she explains.

Paul Tople

Theresa Barbato is fighting the pressure of Ohio's high stakes tests—and trying to keep teaching in the way she knows helps children really learn.

"The children see reading as a testing situation. They're not going to pick up novels as adults."

–Reading specialist Karen Sternberg

"They're not going to pick up novels as adults."

Last year, 29 percent of the children failed the reading test in Sternberg's school, Woodland Elementary. Statewide, 42 percent failed.

Should all these students be held back? The Ohio education department's Patti Grey says this is not at all what the department had in mind when it originally set a target passing score. The idea was to help slow readers, not keep them back.

"We set the score high so more kids would get extra help," she says. "The legislature turned it into a retention score."

Passing rates on high-stakes tests vary wildly from state to state.

In Texas, for instance, 86 percent of students passed the state 10th grade math test last year. In Massachusetts, only 55 percent passed. Yet Massachusetts students far outpace Texas on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The difference? The Massachusetts test is much tougher than the Texas test.

How tough? Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci, an ardent backer of his state's test, refuses to take it himself. When students sat in at his office to force the issue, he escaped out a back door.

At Springfield High School, an inner-city school in western Massachusetts, social studies teacher Lenny Lapon points out that three-quarters of the graduates have been going on to higher education, and yet three-quarters of the students failed the test that the class of 2003 will have to pass to graduate.

That means, notes Lapon, that the test could block half of the school's students from becoming better educated.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association recently launched a television ad campaign to help citizens understand what the testing is doing to children.

Increasingly, teachers who believe in high standards are turning against high-stakes tests.

Many supported them at first, believing they would make students buckle down—and might bring badly needed resources to schools with low scores. But now, teachers are finding that such tests do more harm than good.

Last September, the Ohio Education Association organized public forums on the tests in every state senate district, asking candidates for office to come and listen. Well over 5,000 people attended, mostly parents and educators, and some students as well.

The candidates heard about children who can't sleep, who throw up on test days, who now hate school. OEA is working to change Ohio's testing regimen.

Meanwhile, Ohio teachers do the best they can. At Madge Youtz Elementary in Canton, Theresa Barbato still has her children write journals, even though, she notes, that kind of writing is not tested.

"I haven't given up everything yet," she said last fall. "I still hold on to what I believe in."

But then this veteran teacher hesitated.

"It's October," she said. "Talk to me in January and I'll be feeling the pressure. Even my voice will sound different. I'll know I've got just two months to get them ready for the big test." ✔

—Alain Jehlen

High-stakes questions you won't find on any test

Many politicians are jumping on the high-stakes testing bandwagon, claiming that test mandates will promote high achievement. But they forget the big problems that block the path to real progress. Anyone who wants to improve education has to understand the importance of the questions below —and do something about the answers.

1. What country has the most child poverty in the industrialized world?

A. France
B. Ireland
C. United States

2. Recently, researchers compared the percentage of uncertified teachers in wealthy and poor communities in California. What did they find?

A. Many more uncertified teachers in rich communities
B. No difference between rich and poor
C. Many more uncertified teachers in poor communities

3. How does the time children spend watching TV compare with the time they spend doing homework?

A. Nearly three times as much for TV
B. Twice as much for TV
C. About the same

4. Which country pays teachers the lowest salaries, given its ability to pay?

A. United States
B. Germany
C. Japan

5. One danger of high-stakes testing is that students may give up and drop out. After Texas mandated a graduation test, the number of students who dropped out:

A. decreased
B. stayed the same
C. went up by nearly half

Answers

1. C. The United States has seven times the child poverty rate of Finland. Other countries have more effective anti-poverty programs than the United States. See www.aecf.org/kc1996/summary.htm#chipov.

2. C. 22 percent in the poorest communities, compared with only 2 percent in the richest. See www.ppic.org/publications/PPIC128/ppic128.press.html.

3. A. 17.2 hours per week watching the tube vs. 6.1 hours doing homework for 14- and 15-year-olds. See http://stats.bls.gov/pdf/nlsy97r1.pdf and go to page 11.

4. A. See http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/eiip/eiipid40.html.

5. C. See the paper by Walter Haney of Boston College at http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v8n41/part8.htm.

Q&A

A Senator Challenges the Tests

Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota has introduced legislation that would require schools that get federal funds, if they use tests in graduation or promotion decisions, to consider other measures of student achievement as well.

Wellstone taught at Carleton College in Minnesota for 21 years before winning election to the U.S. Senate in 1990.

AP/Wide World

What inspired you to get involved in the high-stakes testing issue?

In some ways, all politics is personal. I did very poorly on standardized tests. It was really a nightmare. I barely had a combined 800 SAT score. I had an advisor at the University of North Carolina who said to me in my first year, "You're predicted to not graduate."

But I worked hard and did really well. Then I took the Graduate Records and did really poorly. I had to almost fight my way into graduate school. But then I got a doctorate when I was 24. So I've been through it myself.

I've also been in a school every two weeks for the last 10 years—I love to be in schools—and my daughter Marcia is a teacher.

The best teachers just hate being in a testing straightjacket. High-stakes testing is channeling teaching to the kind of rote memorization drill that isn't education.

Why are high-stakes tests so popular with some politicians?

Politically, high-stakes testing is the easiest thing in the world to do. You can pump up your chest and say you're all for rigor. And, you know, it sells. But it leaves untouched all of the key variables that explain why students do well or don't do well.

What about the argument that high-stakes testing is "tough love"?

Even if you could get the testing right, before you start flunking students, you ought to at least make sure that each of them has the same opportunity to do well.

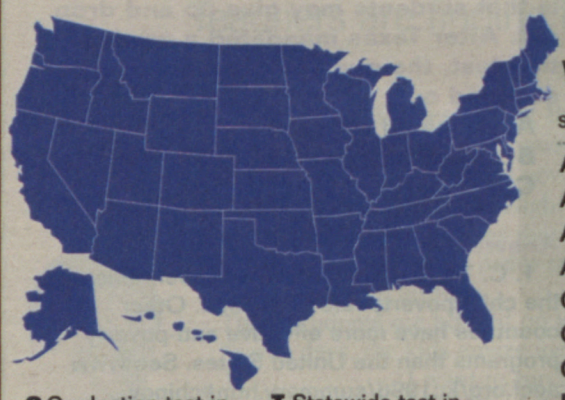
We're not meeting that test. Many of these kids have teachers who aren't certified, decrepit buildings, heating that doesn't work, classes that are too big—never mind what goes on in their lives before they go to school and when they go home.

We're not going to change any of that, but we're going to flunk them!

These kids, some as young as eight, are going to be held back, and they're going to be utterly defeated. They'll be on their way to dropping out of school. ✔

Resources

- If your students are facing a high-stakes test, take a look at NEA's *Twelve Steps Teachers Can Take to Prepare Students for High-Stakes Tests*, a set of practical classroom tips. You can find this and other useful materials at www.nea.org/issues/shorttakes/highstakes.html.
- A new book from the NEA Professional Library, *Coping With Standards, Tests, and Accountability*, offers perspectives from classroom teachers across the country. Order it at the member price of $14.95 at www.nea.org/books. (It's item #2015-4-00-F.)
- Several sites compile state-by-state information on high-stakes tests. The University of Pennsylvania's list is very comprehensive: www.gse.upenn.edu/cpre/docs/pubs/profiles.html.
- Other excellent Web resources include the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu and the Education Commission of the States at www.ecs.org (look in "Education Issues").
- FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing Web site, www.fairtest.org, is a good place to link up with other people working for alternatives to high-stakes tests.
- Several provocative papers about the impact on minority and low-income students, from The Harvard University Civil Rights Project, are at www.law.harvard.edu/groups/civilrights/conferences/testing98/drafts.html.



G Graduation test in effect or planned.

P Promotion test for a lower grade in effect or planned.

T Statewide test in effect or planned.

T Go to www.nea.org/neatoday for a link to a past test.

This brief summary omits some important differences, including how hard a test may be to pass. Also, several states have no student sanctions but do have penalties for teachers or schools.

Where the Stakes Are High for Students

State	Policy	State	Policy	State	Policy
Alabama	–, G, T	Louisiana	P, G, T	Ohio	P, G, T
Alaska	–, G, T	Maine	–, –, T	Oklahoma	–, –, T
Arizona	–, G, T	Maryland	–, G, T	Oregon	–, –, T
Arkansas	–, –, T	Massachusetts	–, G, T	Pennsylvania	–, G, T
California	–, G, T	Michigan	–, –, T	Rhode Island	–, –, T
Colorado	–, –, T	Minnesota	–, G, T	South Carolina	P, G, T
Connecticut	–, –, T	Mississippi	–, G, T	South Dakota	–, –, T
Delaware	P, G, T	Missouri	–, –, T	Tennessee	–, G, T
Florida	P, G, T	Montana	–, –, T	Texas	–, G, T
Georgia	–, G, T	Nebraska	–, –, –	Utah	–, –, T
Hawaii	–, –, T	Nevada	–, G, T	Vermont	–, –, T
Idaho	–, –, T	New Hampshire	–, –, T	Virginia	–, G, T
Illinois	–, –, T	New Jersey	–, G, T	Washington	–, G, T
Indiana	–, G, T	New Mexico	–, G, T	West Virginia	–, –, T
Iowa	–, –, –	New York	P, G, T	Wisconsin	–, –, T
Kansas	–, –, T	North Carolina	P, G, T	Wyoming	–, –, T
Kentucky	–, –, T	North Dakota	–, –, T		

compiled by Marc Pilotin

Does Prepping for High-Stakes Tests Interfere with Teaching?

NANCY BUELL
teaches fourth grade at the Lincoln School in Brookline, Massachusetts. She has taught for 32 years and serves on the state Board of Education's Advisory Council for Mathematics and Science.

yes

As I watch my students debate how much taller fourth graders are than first graders, I am struck by their intuitive use of significant features of the data. As in:

Lee: Fourth graders are 10" taller because the tallest fourth grader is 64" and the tallest first grader is 54".

Tamara: A first grader is about 5" shorter. I found the middle height for each and just subtracted. The middle for the fourth graders is 57" and the middle for the first graders is between 51" and 52".

Dana: 5" or 4", because the most common height for first graders is 53" and the most common height for fourth graders is 58" or 57".

These students are exploring ideas involving maximum, median, and mode. They are considering what features to use to tell what is typical of the two groups so they can be compared. Students support their ideas with information in the data itself. They are developing ways to think about data that will lead to deep understanding of more formal statistics.

The rich mathematical discussions in my class are an outgrowth of my participation in professional development that focused on inquiry-based teaching and the big ideas we should be teaching.

But since high-stakes testing arrived, professional development meetings often focus on how to improve test scores, not on how to improve learning.

Teaching that concentrates on improving test scores is very limited—by the nature of both testing and teaching. Testing involves sampling student knowledge. It is fragmented and only examines learning outcomes. It seldom looks at how well a student understands complex ideas.

A typical test item might give students a set of data and ask for the median. Students would not be asked to select the appropriate statistic to address a question and justify their choice. Yet knowing how to find the median, without knowing when to use it, is useless, except on tests.

If we teach facts and procedures likely to be on the test, without the deeper understanding behind them, we shortchange our students. We must not limit what we teach to what will be tested.

Many teachers feel pressured to choose teaching techniques that help with testing more than learning. They're urged to spend more time on information that mimics test items.

Students should, of course, know how to answer multiple choice, short answer, and open response questions, but teaching these test-taking skills should not be confused with teaching a subject. Some teachers spend a day a week using test-like items, not to sample what children know, but to try to teach the content.

Teaching should build on what students already know and help them develop a rich web of interconnected ideas. Real learning involves inquiry, hypothesis testing, exploration, and reflection.

Teaching to the test will not help my students think about how to use features of data sets to answer real questions. Teaching to the test is not teaching. ✔

CHAROLETTE CRAWFORD
teaches fourth grade at Coteau-Bayou Blue School in Houma, Louisiana. A 27-year teaching veteran, she helped set the cut scores for her state's high-stakes fourth grade test and now serves on a state panel for staff development.

no

Preparing students to take high-stakes tests does not interfere with teaching. It enhances teaching. When used properly, high-stakes tests can focus attention on weaknesses in the curriculum and in the teaching of it, as well as furnish an assessment of student progress. Once identified, student weak areas can be strengthened.

When the new high-stakes tests and revised curriculum were introduced in Louisiana, along with new accountability standards, many teachers were bewildered at the prospect of being held accountable for teaching a new curriculum without being told how to teach it.

Yet many of these teachers were also open to the new ideas and began working to find ways to implement them. They were aided by funding from the state for additional reading materials and in-service training.

Teachers often feel overwhelmed by the changes involved in our state's rigorous new standards, but many Louisiana educators are beginning to take ownership of their new curriculum. They're growing confident when making scope and sequence decisions. They're consistently re-evaluating what they have taught, and how they have taught it, so they can do better next time.

These educators are revamping their classroom activities and their teacher-made tests to match them more closely to the format and tone of the state-mandated tests.

Helping students become familiar with the state-mandated test formats, by using them in the classroom, prevents having to spend valuable class time to "practice" for the high-stakes tests.

Learners, meanwhile, are reaping the benefits of having teachers who are determined that their students will be as prepared as possible to relate the skills they learn in school to real-life situations. They're becoming life-long learners, besides performing well on standardized tests.

Some educators complain that they must "teach to the test."

But others consider this to be a weak objection since the state tests focus on information and skills students are expected to know at certain points in their schooling.

These educators say the curriculum objectives covered by the state tests should be taught before the tests are given, with the remaining objectives covered afterwards. This is a very workable arrangement when high-stakes tests are given early in the spring.

To be sure, some Louisiana educators are still resisting the changes that come with the state tests.

But most realize this is an idea whose time has come.

In 1998, my school helped pilot the fourth grade language arts test. I was nervous about how my students would fare. When they finished, I asked for reactions.

Much to my surprise, students calmly informed me that the state test was "kind of hard, kind of easy, kind of fun."

That day, my students unwittingly reassured me that learners who are prepared for high-stakes tests need not fear them. ✔

What's Your Opinion?

Does Prepping for High-Stakes Tests Interfere with Teaching?
To vote, visit our Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday and see the results instantly.

Should Special Needs Students Be Exempt from Graduation Tests?
The tally on this Debate question from the last issue of *NEA Today:*
52% Yes **48% No**

The Winner: Kids and Public Schools

In every way, voters told politicians in November they support quality public education—not cutbacks and vouchers.

"There isn't one candidate out there who wasn't running on public education issues."

—Mary Elizabeth Teasley,
NEA Government Relations Director

November's Presidential race and a handful of other candidate showdowns may have produced razor-thin results, but, overall, the November elections produced one whopping, lopsided victor: America's public schools.

"Public education was a top issue among candidates and voters at all race levels," stresses NEA President Bob Chase. "Public schools emerged as a uniting force in this election, and the result is an overwhelming mandate to improve and support those schools."

In high-profile ballot initiatives in California and Michigan, voters defeated voucher proposals that would have funded private school tuition with public tax dollars by 70-30 margins.

And, in Alaska and Colorado, taxpayers rejected measures that would have slashed public education funding.

Voters in three states approved NEA-backed initiatives to fund public education in new, creative ways.

These measures include a lower, 55 percent threshold in California for taxpayer approval of school modernization bonds, a new "education" sales tax in Arizona, and dedicated funding in Washington State for needs like class size reduction and school employee cost-of living adjustments.

"As an Association, we've never before won so many proactive measures like these," notes NEA Government Relations Director Mary Elizabeth Teasley. "This is a clear indication of where voters are on education, and all the officials elected in November ought to reflect on that fact."

Even before the votes were counted, it was crystal clear to politicians what voters were thinking about.

"There wasn't one candidate out there who wasn't running on public education," says Teasley, "be the issue early childhood education, class size reduction, or teacher compensation."

And after the ballots were cast, three national exit polls revealed that education topped voter priority lists, outdistancing the economy, tax cuts, and even Social Security.

At the federal level, citizens voted in near-equal numbers for two Presidential candidates, Al Gore and George Bush, who both spoke repeatedly about education's priority importance.

Voters also created a virtual Republican-Democratic tie in the Senate—producing, in the process, what could become a bipartisan, pro-public education majority.

NEA members nationwide had a big hand in shaping this pro-public school Senate majority, working to defeat anti-public education lawmakers who favored vouchers and opposed funding for needs like class size reduction.

Meanwhile, at the same time, NEA members and affiliates worked equally hard to re-elect, whatever their party, proven friends of education like Republicans James Jeffords of Vermont and Olympia Snowe of Maine.

None of this Election Day progress could have happened without the time and treasure of thousands of NEA members, who voluntarily contributed more than $6.5 million in the 2000 election cycle to NEA's Fund for Children and Public Education—a 25 percent increase over 1999—and burned up phone lines on behalf of NEA-backed candidates.

NEA channeled school employees' fierce devotion to children and public schools directly into high-priority federal and state campaigns. NEA's outreach effort included regular E-mails to 50,000 Association "cyber-activists" and over 3 million phone calls and 11 million pieces of mail to 2.5 million NEA members.

NEA's unrelenting focus on children and public education also had an impact on races for the new House of Representatives. The Association's campaign work helped elect scores of pro-public education candidates from both political parties.

And, at the state level, Association-backed candidates won nine of 11 gubernatorial contests.

Results in state legislative races were more mixed, but the message to politicians wasn't. Washington State Rep. Don Carlson, who won a state Senate seat with the backing of NEA's state affiliate, says voters now expect legislators from both major parties to work together to improve public education.

"Education is not a D thing or an R thing," notes Carlson, a Vancouver Republican. "It's what the people of the state of Washington expect us to do." ✔

California Teachers Association

California Teachers Association activists help celebrate the overwhelming defeat of school vouchers.

Coalition Work—and Your NEA Dues—Stop Voucher Initiatives

California and Michigan NEA members join hands with community allies to reaffirm public education.

As the dust from Election 2000 clears and winning candidates move to fill campaign promises, expect to see lots more education legislative proposals coming your way. But don't expect, for a while at least, to see many private tuition voucher proposals.

That's because, on Election Day, NEA members in California and Michigan helped crush extravagantly funded private school tuition voucher initiatives.

In both states, NEA members energized broad-based coalitions, worked phone banks, and walked precincts to explain how vouchers would cost taxpayers billions, hurt kids, provide no accountability to taxpayers, and abandon neighborhood schools.

Your NEA dues dollars helped make the grassroots and media campaigns against these voucher initiatives possible.

At last year's Representative Assembly, the nearly 10,000 delegates voted, by a two-to-one margin, to raise dues by $5 to counter attacks on public education and better promote the good things happening in public schools.

Sixty percent of the funds raised by this increase are helping NEA state affiliates fight voucher proposals and other attacks on public schools.

"The victory over vouchers is not an end, it is a beginning," NEA President Bob Chase told reporters at a post-election news briefing in Washington, D.C.

"We will go back and do the hard work it takes to address needs in urban and rural schools," said Chase. "We will join hands with religious leaders, civil rights activists, and business leaders to join their voices with parents to bring about changes and improvements."

Reinforcing Chase's message at the post-election news briefing were African-American and Hispanic community leaders, who voiced their constituents' opposition to vouchers as an answer to the problems of public schools.

Rev. Wendell Anthony, president of the Detroit chapter of the NAACP, said Michigan's voucher initiative was shredded by an 82-18 margin in his city because Detroiters think "vouchers rob from the poor and give to the rich and cream the best of students from public schools." Public schools, he noted, need proven solutions like smaller class sizes, more parental involvement, and more teacher training, not vouchers.

"Latino voters in Los Angeles voted by 77 percent against vouchers because they recognize the crucial importance of public education," reported Brent Wilkes of the League of United Latin American Citizens, the nation's largest Hispanic organization. "Families tell me they want good, quality public schools down the street from where they live, schools that recognize the needs of children and have real resources."

"The passion in the Latino community is education, and there's lots of passion for quality public education," added Jose Perez, president of the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "We need to work with public schools to enhance their ability to work with children. Educated, well-trained folks are essential for small businesses."

Rev. Anthony said anti-voucher forces triumphed in Detroit because "we brought everybody to the table who had a stake in this endeavor, including religious groups and New Detroit, a business group. Now we need to keep them at the table."

"Let's stop the warring," urged NEA's Chase. "We know how to turn school districts around, but there has to be a *will*, a partnership to do it."

School improvements like smaller class sizes and better teacher preparation, said Chase, are already making significant differences in states from California to North Carolina.

"Improving local schools is a local project," the NEA president added. "It must take place school by school and community by community, but it must be a national priority."

"NEA," concluded Chase, "is committed to making low-performing schools into high-priority schools." ✔

Photos by Mario Tama

Moving Beyo Vouchers

Detroit NAACP leader, Rev. Wendell Anthony, above left, and Jose Perez of the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, at a post-election voucher briefing.

Heroes & Zeroes

AP/Wide World

▲ Missouri NEA members lost a true champion of public education when Governor Mel Carnahan died in an October plane crash. His legacy includes reduced class sizes in lower grades, safer classrooms, and funding for full-day kindergarten and summer school programs. Missouri voters agree that Carnahan was pretty special, electing him posthumously to the U.S. Senate in November. Carnahan's widow, Jean, will fill that seat.

▼ Illinois's Triad District school board recently bargained a contract with the 50-member Triad ESP Association without ever mentioning what was, apparently, the board's follow-up goal: scrapping a 20-year policy permitting termination only for "just cause." Now the district faces an unfair labor practice charge and some very disappointed secretaries and paras. "If a goal of education is to teach fair treatment," says para Ellen Schoenenberg, "the same standard should apply to treatment of our district employees."

▲ Sue Priest, president of the Scio (Oregon) Classroom Teachers Association is most definitely a hero to Scio High School counselor Vivian Weglin. Priest, a middle school teacher, "is always right there when any member needs support," Weglin says. "She invests enormous amounts of time in helping us, keeps us on top of the information we need to know, and stands beside us all the way when any of us has difficulties with the administration or school board. She's an excellent advocate!"

'A Vast Cadre Of Human Resources'

NEA's UniServ program, now 30 years old, has brought quality representation to school staff.

Iain D. P. Karroll

Oregon UniServ staffer Susan Anderson, third from left, works with local volunteers before the fall elections. "Advocacy is the number one part of my job," she stresses.

The next time you grouse about your endless school duties, think about the job of NEA UniServ staffers Susan Anderson and Tim Thornburg.

These full-time Association reps each drive at least 2,000 miles a month—Anderson up and down the Oregon coast, Thornburg across a broad swath of Delaware farmland—to represent school employees in trouble, support local contract bargaining, train NEA local affiliate leaders and members, coordinate political campaign work, and more.

Much more. But you'd never guess what can eat up the biggest chunk of their week.

"Most UniServ staffers spend a significant amount of time in private, often confidential, sessions with members who are dealing with personal and professional problems," reveals Anderson, a former high school English and speech teacher.

"Their concerns," she notes, "could be related to problems with administrators, parent complaints, student threats, false criminal charges, or the immensity of what teachers are asked to do. I have to get them through the emotional part."

Providing this kind of direct assistance to members is important, notes NEA Mid-Atlantic Regional Director Roger Ross, "but job number one of a UniServ staff person is to help local affiliates develop the capacity to advocate for members in a variety of areas—from collective bargaining and political action to professional development and instructional improvement."

Gary Emeigh

Delaware UniServ Director Tim Thornburg: "I make myself as readily available to members as possible."

Member advocacy "*is* my primary job," agrees Anderson.

"All school employees, new and veteran," Ross explains, "want help to do their job better and see that the Association can help them gain improvements in a variety of ways."

Since its launch in 1971, the UniServ—Unified Service—program has been NEA's largest single budget item, by far. This year, from the national level, NEA will spend $47 million to help finance the UniServ staff network.

This support will fund an estimated one-fourth to one-fifth of the cost of each UniServ position. NEA affiliates provide the rest of UniServ funding.

Nationwide, there are now 1,650 full-time and more than 200 part-time UniServ staffers.

NEA support has helped develop a cadre of UniServ staffers trained in everything from organizing and school change to collaborative dispute resolution processes and group facilitation.

To ensure ongoing skill development in a UniServ staffer's first three years of service, NEA pays all transportation and on-site costs of two basic, nine-day "CORE" training sessions.

After that, NEA pays air transportation costs for a staffer's attendance at one training session a year—and makes available a full range of national and regionally based training opportunities.

NEA and state affiliate training, which continues throughout a UniServ rep's career, helps shape an individual who's "a good listener, a strong advocate, and an effective conflict manager, facilitator, and organizer," says Delaware UniServ Director Tim Thornburg, a former high school English and journalism teacher.

What else makes NEA's UniServ program so effective? Some clues:

• **Closeness to the membership.** With a member-to-UniServ staff ratio that typically ranges from 1,300:1 to 1,500:1, the UniServ program allows many staffers a chance to personally know and bond with NEA members.

"I make myself as readily available to members as possible," says Thornburg, who started UniServ work in 1999. "I'm trying to get to know members as *people*. If I know them as individuals, I get to know their likes and dislikes, and they're more likely to get involved in the Association."

Oregon's Susan Anderson, like many UniServ staffers across the country, meets regularly with a council of leaders from the local affiliates she serves.

"My council, representing 15 locals, has always set the direction for my work," she points out. "These people establish goals and priorities for me, along with ways to meet them."

• **Continuity of service.** "I would liken the UniServ program to a civil service system," says NEA's Roger Ross. "The Association's elected leaders determine policies and programmatic direction, while an ongoing cadre of professional UniServ staff helps implement them."

The result: stability and *fairness* in representation.

"Only in this union is there such a separation of staff and governance," emphasizes Illinois UniServ Director Marcus Albrecht. "We field reps don't promote candidates in local elections—although it would probably be easy for staff to influence voting—and are even

THE BOTTOM LINE

TOXIC SITES: Nearly half the 1.9 million apartments that house America's poorest families are located within a mile of factories that emit serious air pollution. For more: www.dallasnews.com/toxic/1003index.html and www.hud.gov/emaps.

ALCOHOL: People who begin drinking before age 14 are about three times more likely than those who begin drinking in their twenties to be injured while drinking. For more: silk.nih.gov/silk/niaaa1/releases/injury.htm.

SAFETY AND KIDS: In 1998, the latest year with complete statistics available, suicide accounted for 33 percent of the children and teenagers killed by gunfire. For more: www.cdfactioncouncil.org/children_and_guns_release_10_2_00.htm.

EXPULSIONS: Some 3,523 students were expelled for bringing guns to school in 1998-99, a drop of over 2,000 from three years earlier. Of the expelled, 59 percent had handguns. For more: www.ed.gov/PressReleases/10-2000/100300.html.

prohibited from handling ballots in regional elections."

Adds Albrecht: "This means that the Association's representation of members isn't influenced by political considerations and that UniServ jobs hinge on the continued quality of work, *not* on the delivery of votes for elected officers."

• **Reps who really know the work of members.** "UniServ reps really *know* the business our members are in and the laws under which they work," says Lenny Lavalette, director of affiliate relations for NEA-New York. "They have a complete understanding of public education and the job our members do, and they bring this knowledge to all areas of their work."

Oregon's Susan Anderson routinely draws on her past education experience to deliver top quality training to her members, wherever they might work.

As a staffer for NEA's Indiana state affiliate, she worked with several districts to develop education consortiums for members in isolated areas, each offering professional workshops "developed and delivered predominantly by local people."

And now, on the Oregon coast, Anderson organizes three training events a year for her local council—on everything from IDEA regulations to teacher relicensing requirements.

Drawing on insights gained as a novice teacher, Tim Thornburg organized new teacher activities, including a New Teacher Advisory Committee and a newsletter, while serving as UniServ director for the Omaha (Nebraska) Education Association.

And since joining the staff of the Delaware Education Association last summer, he's learning everything he can about the issues important to education support staff.

"I recently taught conflict management to members of the Red Clay Paraprofessionals Association," he notes. "It's important that administrators understand that ESP need professional development as much as teachers."

"UniServ reps have a passion in advocating for, defending, and preserving public education."

—NEA UniServ program manager Howard Weinberg

• **A network of professional colleagues.** Because so many of them have trained together or collaborated in NEA field-based programs, UniServ staffers "feel part of an NEA family," notes Thornburg.

"Colleagues and I are constantly sharing resources and ideas," he explains. "If I know of a colleague in California who can help me, I have no reservations about calling up. We support one another."

"If I have a problem or need a sounding board," adds Susan Anderson, "I have a vast cadre of human resources to tap into. No other organization can provide that. I love working for NEA." ✔

For more information on the NEA UniServ program, go to www.nea.org/aboutnea/uniserv.

YOUR DUES DID IT

Want to Apply for UniServ Work?

NEA offers two programs designed to help Association activists prepare to apply for UniServ jobs offered by NEA state and local affiliates:

■ Susan Anderson is a 1991 graduate of the **NEA Affirmative Action Intern Program,** an effort created to increase representation of ethnic minorities and women in UniServ staff positions. The program includes a five-week training program over the summer, followed by full-time practical training for up to three months with an experienced UniServ staff mentor. If you're an active member interested in applying, send a letter of interest by December 8 to Brenda Vincent, NEA Affiliate Capacity Building, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3290.

■ In 1999, Tim Thornburg went through the **NEA Pre-Employment and Development Program**. Successful applicants for this initiative demonstrate an ability to shift from governance to staff positions, then are offered 14 days of training followed by a minimum of four weeks of mentoring by UniServ staff. The deadline for applying for the next session: March 31. For an application, contact your NEA state affiliate's UniServ manager. ✔

Do'ers Profile

Dave Eggen

SANDRA SCHLENKER

■ **Name and profession:** Sandra Schlenker, high school family and consumer science teacher

■ **NEA local affiliate:** Sioux Falls (South Dakota) Education Association

■ **Position:** Chair of SFEA's Project REACH—Raising Educators' Awareness Concerning Health—team.

■ **Latest accomplishment:** With a $2,000 grant from NEA's Vivian Roy Bowser Cancer Education Fund and help from NEA's Health Information Network, Schlenker and nine other activists have organized a Project REACH team in their district—one of seven such efforts in the Sioux Falls region.

The team goals: Promote local screening and early detection for breast and cervical cancer, create "educational resource options," and foster "hope and confidence" that cancer can be overcome.

Driven by stats revealing that women in education have higher breast cancer death rates than other women, the Sioux Falls team has brainstormed a variety of ways to educate the school community about the need to detect and treat cancers early.

"We've run booths at an in-service attended by 3,000 employees, issued reminders with necklace beads, and ordered copies of the NEA Health Information Network's *Personal Health Pocket Calendar,*" reports team leader Schlenker. "And we plan to hand out 'reminder' emery boards and have volunteers at all district sites speak at staff meetings about the importance of early cancer detection."

The Sioux Falls team kicked off its campaign with a widely distributed brochure/poster featuring a photo of 23 district employees—men and women—who have survived cancer, along with a list of resources ranging from local free clinics to the NEA Health Information Network Web site at www.neahin.org.

"I had no idea if cancer survivors would want to make themselves so vulnerable," recalls Schlenker. "I was so pleased that people were so willing to share. "

■ **Words of Wisdom:** "School employees are notorious for nurturing others at the expense of their own health. People put screening off or are deterred by the lack of access to private telephones in schools.

"But 80 million cancer survivors are alive today thanks to early detection. Screening and exams, when conducted regularly by a health care professional, can result in detection of cancers of the breast, colon, rectum, cervix, prostate, testes, oral cavities, and skin.

"When screenable cancers are found early, treatment is more likely to be successful. Self-examinations may also result in detection of tumors at earlier stages. If all Americans participated in a regular screening, this rate could increase to more than 95 percent." ✔

For more information, go to www.cancer.org.

SCHOOL SIZE: Over 70 percent of high school students attend schools with more than 1,000 students. Half of high school students are in schools with more than 1,500 students. For more: www.ed.gov/PressReleases/10-2000/100400a.html.

COMMERCIALIZATION: About 200 school districts have signed exclusive contracts with soft-drink companies. These arrangements are the fastest-growing form of school advertising. For more: www.gao.gov/new.items/he00156.pdf.

EARLY CHILDHOOD: Title I, the largest federal elementary or secondary aid program, is funding more preschool efforts. About 17 percent of Title I districts are now using aid dollars for preschool. For more: www.gao.gov/new.items/he00171.pdf.

EQUAL RIGHTS: Sexual assault and violence against women costs employers in the United States an estimated $4 billion per year for absenteeism, increased health care expenses, and related costs. For more: www.unfpa.org/swp/2000/english/press_kit/.

Back on the Clock In Stafford County

Virginia bus drivers organize, unite with teachers, and win compensation for 'off the clock' work.

"It's not in the budget. . . It's a condition of employment. . . There's no recourse. . ."

Before they organized in 1999, school transportation employees in Stafford County, Virginia, routinely heard these management responses to questions about compensation for tasks drivers were performing without pay, everything from submitting to federally mandated random drug tests to appearing in court as witnesses to traffic violations.

The Stafford County school district, less than 50 miles south of Washington, D.C., had enough money to build new schools and hire new teachers, but it was still asking its bus drivers and monitors to work "off the clock"—in violation of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act—and on the clock at wages of up to $3 an hour less than their counterparts in neighboring counties.

Organizing has strengthened this team of Stafford County transportation workers and managers. And that'll mean real changes in everything from policy to pay.

"In the back of my mind," recalls Stafford trainer/driver Annette Hall, "I thought, 'This isn't right. We're getting big enough as a district to do things differently.'"

Drivers, bus monitors, and mechanics came to realize they needed a smarter way to assert their rights than scattershot speeches at school board meetings and gripes at district-run "rap" sessions. They needed a collective voice and professional backup.

What these support professionals needed, in fact, was right under their noses all along: the NEA-affiliated Stafford Education Association.

Even without a state bargaining law, SEA had won solid gains for Stafford teachers, like paid health insurance for retirees, and built a productive relationship with administrators and local residents. In 1999, this relationship generated a 98 percent vote in favor of a local property tax increase to professionalize teacher salaries.

Word travels.

"After I had spoken to a school board meeting on behalf of our members in the spring of 1999," says SEA President Rebecca Danello, "two drivers came up to me, said they'd like to join SEA, and asked for information."

Since that encounter, Stafford transportation employees have been overwhelmed by the solidarity of teacher colleagues and the professional support of Virginia Education Association staffers, from their UniServ director to VEA attorneys in Richmond.

They've reciprocated by joining the Association en masse—at last count, 188 of 200 transportation staffers had become Association members—and participating in SEA in a very big way.

The local's transportation unit now has a chair, Annette Hall, and two co-chairs, Jeanna Brown and Linda Powell, plus a secretary, Kathy Mathis, and no fewer than 19 Association reps to cover every middle and high school.

In a non-bargaining, "right-to-work" state like Virginia, big membership numbers and active member involvement can be a critical equalizer.

In Stafford County, this formula has produced:

■ **Payment for work performed.** Right after signing up with SEA, Stafford drivers worked with VEA's legal staff to document district violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act and what it would cost to rectify the situation. A group of drivers, accompanied by UniServ Director Mike Sowder, then met with administrators and outlined their case for a federal wage-and-hour complaint.

That homework paid off. The district agreed to compensate workers, as of last July, for time spent on everything from submitting to random drug tests to driving to and from a school to transport students for field trips.

■ **A role in drafting written district policy.** For the first time, drivers have helped revise the handbook of rules and regs for Stafford County employees.

"We went through the book, deleting and adding things, like accident procedures and locations of fuel stations for the benefit of new drivers," reports driver chair Hall. "Then we met with Transportation Director Larry Himes and got some things changed in print."

■ **A positive relationship with administrators.** Himes and Assistant Transportation Director Margaret Hill "have been great to work with" since the staff organized, notes Mike Sowder. "They're always willing to meet with us—in fact, I often advise people to talk to Larry about individual problems and I don't hear back from them again!"

■ **A smarter way to increase pay.** At press time, Stafford transportation

"Drivers' participation in our local makes the community aware that everything we do in education is a team effort."

—Stafford Education Association President Rebecca Danello

THE BOTTOM LINE

CHILDREN'S HEALTH: The 1996 federal welfare reform tightly restricted Medicaid eligibility for immigrants. About half—46 percent—of all low-income immigrant kids now have no health insurance. For more: www.cbpp.org/10-4-00health.htm.

HAZARDS: About 200 U.S. cities have received over a half-billion dollars in federal aid since 1992 to remove lead from private homes. Kids with high lead levels are seven times more likely to drop out. For more: www.hud.gov/pressrel/pr00-245.html.

SCHOOL SAFETY: Only 17 percent of students reported the presence of street gangs at their schools in 1999. Four years earlier, about 30 percent reported gang activity in their schools. For more: www.ed.gov/PressReleases/10-2000/102600.html.

DENTAL CARE: For every child uninsured for medical care, two to three children are uninsured for oral health care. Only one in five kids on Medicaid currently see a dentist in the average year. For more: www.oralhealthamerica.org.

Photos by Paul Tañedo

employees had completed a 21-question survey—developed by Virginia Education Association researchers—on pay, benefits, and working conditions, while Annette Hall had closely examined the pay scale for needed structural changes.

"After I present teachers' 2000-2001 pay and benefit proposals to the school board," says local President Danello, "I'll turn to Annette, who will do the same for support staff." Stay tuned.

■ **An even better relationship with teachers—and the community.** Danello, the district's English and drama coordinator, says that transportation employees are "very comfortable" with certified staffers and will stand to benefit from SEA's commitment to professional development and community outreach.

"We can't educate kids unless they get to school, and drivers are often the first adult school employees they see in the morning—it's important not to discount that," she stresses. "Their participation in our NEA local affiliate makes everyone in the greater community aware that everything we do in education is a team effort, be it in the classroom or on the bus route."

■ **Strength in the workplace.** Despite Virginia's non-bargaining environment, "Management realizes that VEA and NEA are a force to be reckoned with," says UniServ Director Mike Sowder.

"We have almost 1,000 members in Stafford County, 57,000 members in Virginia, and over 2.5 million members in the nation," Sowder adds. "We've got more clout than any other organization in the United States, and administrators and school boards know it, because they're actively involved in elections."

What does all that mean for the average bus driver? Concludes Annette Hall: "A supervisor thinks twice before doing something." ✔

For more information, contact UniServ Director Mike Sowder at 540/347-7801.

BASICS FOR BEGINNERS

It All Started in 'Spotsy'

Transportation employees in Virginia's Stafford County didn't have to start from scratch; they followed a path blazed 10 years earlier by colleagues in neighboring Spotsylvania County.

Today "Spotsy" drivers are 95 percent organized and have the pay, benefits, and respect to show for it.

Substitute drivers in Spotsylvania County get $9 an hour, regular drivers and "contracted subs" get nearly $12, and the most senior drivers can earn $75.78 a day.

Contracted drivers enjoy health insurance, a four-hour daily pay minimum, 10 sick and two personal days a year, and 30 minutes of daily pay for chores like fueling. They're entitled to 10 paid hours of in-service a year and two paid professional days to attend NEA state affiliate conferences.

Over a decade, Spotsylvania ESP have learned they must:

1) Stick together. "You've got to get united, stand up, and do something," says trainer/driver Pat Stanley, driver spokesperson for the Spotsylvania Education Association. "We won a decent wage by refusing at one point to drive field trips, which were optional, non-contract work."

2) Make management manage. Spotsy drivers have taught administrators how to do their jobs better—by always pushing for a defined chain of command, procedures, and employee guidelines. The result: a solid working relationship.

3) Sign up those non-members. Non-stop organizing pays off in Spotsylvania County. "If you have a problem, the first thing a supervisor asks you is, 'Are you a member?'" notes Stanley. "You definitely get treated differently when you're an Association member. We get respect now." ✔

For more information, contact Pat Stanley at psta668648@aol.com.

KUDOS TO...

. . . The **California Teachers Association** and other affiliates of California's Retirement Coalition have successfully lobbied for $12.1 billion in pension improvements for members of the State Teachers Retirement System.

Among the many gains: STRS members with at least 25 years of service will now have benefits based on their highest earning year. Those with 30 or more years will receive a longevity bonus.

"This package will help maintain teaching as a true career," says Beverly Carlson, chair of the CTA State Council's Retirement Committee. "We want newcomers to see this as a profession—not a short-term job where they quit and do something else."

. . . ESP in most of Maryland's Eastern Shore counties don't enjoy bargaining rights, but that hasn't stopped the **Teachers Association of Somerset County** from winning an average one-year pay increase of 15.6 percent for paraeducators.

TASC built community support for a raise, and chief para spokesperson Juanita Faye Hoffman entered "meet-and-confer" talks with the school board accompanied by reps from every school. Her presentation on the pay gap between paras and other Somerset ESP won the day.

. . . In contract talks last summer, teacher members of the **Absecon (New Jersey) Education Association** refused to settle early on some "nice numbers" until the needs of ESP members were met first. That solidarity netted raises over three years of 19.5 percent for teachers and 12 to 30-plus percent for ESP, reinstatement of dependent health coverage for non-tenured teachers, and increases for sick leave buyback and tuition reimbursement.

. . . In two days of strikes last fall, the 4,700-member **Buffalo (New York) Teachers Federation** braved massive legal penalties—from two days of docked teacher pay for each day on the picket line, to the eight-day jailing of BTF President Phil Rumore—to fight for the needs of kids and schools.

The resulting settlement, totalling $7.5 million more than the school board's "final" offer before the strike, reverses cuts in grades one to three art, music, and physical education programs over a period of three years and reduces class size in settings where special needs students are mainstreamed.

The new pact also increases funding for the purchase and distribution of classroom supplies and protects early retirement incentives and retiree health benefits, which had been targeted by the board for deep cuts.

Buffalo strikers received strong support from other area unions, the working press, the public, and **NEA-New York**. *(For more, go to www.neany.org/advocate/3.html.)* ✔

The Buffalo News

Buffalo Teachers Federation President Phil Rumore was jailed for leading two days of strikes last fall.

WORK HOURS: African American middle-income families are now logging about 500 more hours annually than white counterparts, says the new Economic Policy Institute report, *The State of Working America 2000-2001*. For more: www.epinet.org.

WORKING MOMS: Six of every 10 mothers with a child under one are now in the workforce. In 1976, only three of 10 women with infants worked outside the home. For more: www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/fertility.html.

POOR KIDS: Child poverty in the United States is down, but children still make up the largest segment of Americans living below the official poverty line. About 17 percent of kids are poor. For more: www.census.gov/hhes/www/povty99.html.

HOUSING: The average worker in the United States now needs to earn $12.47 an hour, over twice the $5.15 federal minimum wage, to afford a two-bedroom rental unit at local market rates. For more: www.Nlihc.org/oor2000/index.htm.

RIGHTS WATCH

Cyber Threats on the Rise

School officials and courts are struggling with an epidemic of Web pages where students ridicule, vilify, and even threaten to kill teachers.

Justin Swidler was ticked off. So the eighth-grader from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania created his own Web page titled "Teacher Sux." There he posted a vicious attack on his math teacher, Kathleen Fulmer, and principal, Thomas Kartsotis.

For starters, the student created a picture of Fulmer with her head cut off and blood pouring from her neck.

Accompanying the illustration was the question, "Why Should She Die?" under which he wrote, "Take a look at the diagram and the reasons I give, then give me $20.00 to help pay for the hitman."

The site was rife with profanity, displayed a photograph of Fulmer morphing into Hitler, and showed a likeness of Kartsotis being hit by a cartoon bullet.

Word spread, and 234 visitors viewed the site. The Web page shook up the entire school community, particularly Fulmer. The threats caused her serious health problems that ultimately led to her retirement after a 26-year career.

Swidler was expelled for threatening, harassing, and disrespecting a teacher and principal, but he challenged the discipline on free speech grounds.

Last July, the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania upheld the expulsion, ruling that school officials can "discipline students for off-campus activity where that activity materially and substantially interferes with the education process." In this case, the damage caused to Fulmer and to the school community met that legal standard.

"Regrettably, in this day and age where school violence is becoming more commonplace, school officials are justified in taking very seriously threats against faculty and other students," the court said.

Swidler's words were "disrespectful" and "constituted harassment and threats." The student may have meant his comments as "mere hyperbole," but he crossed, the court concluded, "that line of conduct that we, as a society, find acceptable."

Justin Swidler's legal troubles aren't over yet. Fulmer and her husband have sued him and his parents for damages. In November, a Northampton County jury awarded Fulmer $450,000 for invasion of privacy and $50,000 to her husband for loss of consortium.

The jury specifically found that Swidler's parents were liable because they failed to properly supervise their son. A civil lawsuit by principal Kartsotis against the Swidlers is still pending.

In a related case, the Indiana State Teachers Association last year sponsored a lawsuit on behalf of three teachers from Carmel who were identified in a student's Web site as "satan worshipping demons."

Titled "tyme-2-dye," the Web site urged fellow students to shun and laugh at the named teachers and was illustrated by various satanic symbols. One of the teachers targeted by the Web site discovered it on April 21, 1999, the day after the Columbine shootings.

In a settlement announced last May, Brian Conradt and his mother agreed to pay the teachers $5,000.

The law in this area is still developing. As the cases discussed in the sidebar attest, not every "offensive" comment posted on a student Web site will justify discipline.

But, at a minimum, student off-campus cyberspeech is punishable where school officials reasonably believe it could disrupt the school, or where it seriously threatens or actually causes harm to teachers or others.

In a 1986 decision, the Supreme Court gave school officials wide discretion to discipline students for uncivil speech while in school. The Court said that schools "must teach the shared values of a civilized social order" and are free to determine "that the essential lessons of civil, mature conduct cannot be conveyed in a school that tolerates lewd, indecent, or offensive speech."

But the still-open question is whether this authority extends to off-campus speech and whether school officials can punish students for comments made in cyberspace that are merely uncivil or disrespectful. That question will be decided as student use—and misuse—of the Internet increases. ✔

— Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

Student Free Speech Rights Prevail

Citing First Amendment concerns, three federal courts recently overturned student suspensions based on Web site postings.

■ In Missouri, the Woodland R-IV School District gave Brandon Beussink a 10-day suspension for creating a Web page that used vulgar language to criticize the school's official Web page.

The court held that the principal punished Beussink merely because he "was upset by the content of the homepage," rather than out of fear of a school disruption. "Disliking or being upset by the content of a student's speech," the court warned, "is not an acceptable justification for limiting student speech."

■ In Ohio, a federal judge ruled that the Westlake Schools couldn't suspend junior Sean O'Brien for posting an unflattering description of his band teacher on his personal Web page. The student had called the teacher "an overweight middle-aged man who doesn't like to get haircuts" and practiced favoritism.

The court rejected the school's claim that O'Brien could be punished under a rule prohibiting "physical, written, or verbal disrespect/ threat" of or against school employees. The school district later agreed to pay the student $30,000 to settle the case.

■ In Washington, a federal court ruled in February that the Kent School District No. 415 violated the First Amendment rights of senior Nick Emmett by suspending him.

Emmett had posted mock "obituaries" of two friends. The obits, inspired by a creative writing class, were written tongue-in-cheek. The court found "no evidence" that the work was "intended to threaten anyone" or "manifested any violent tendencies whatsoever."

Emmett also recovered $6,000 in legal fees.

–M.D.S.

THE BOTTOM LINE

TAXES: The federal income tax rate paid by top corporations has dropped from 26.5 percent in 1988 to 20.1 percent in 1998. Two dozen companies made a combined $12 billion in 1998 and paid no federal income tax. For more: www.itepnet.org.

ECONOMIC SUCCESS: States that pay competitive teacher salaries and spend more per pupil tend to have higher quality jobs and more competitive businesses than states that shortchange public education. For more: http://DRC.CFED.ORG.

FUNDING: About half of adult Americans, 47 percent, believe that the federal government should ensure that per pupil spending is roughly equivalent in all public schools. For more: www.policyattitudes.org/OnlineReports/Education/edu_brief.html.

HOUSEHOLD WEALTH: The share of America's wealth held by the top 1 percent has nearly doubled since 1976, with the top 1 percent now worth more than the bottom 90 percent. For more: www.ufenet.org/research/Economic_Apartheid_Data.html#p57.

INTERVIEW

Lorrie Shepard
How to Fight A 'Death Star'

A leader among testing experts speaks out on high-stakes tests and what to do about them.

University of Colorado

Lorrie Shepard, professor of research methodology at the University of Colorado at Boulder, is a national authority on standardized tests and other forms of assessment. Last year, she was president of the American Educational Research Association, the leading school research organization. She spoke recently with *NEA Today*'s Alain Jehlen.

Why are standardized tests getting so much attention these days?
Politicians are paying attention to education and relying on testing to make things change. The word "accountability" has gotten a different meaning. In the past, it could mean "honest reporting." Today, the idea seems to be that you can force change using rewards and punishments for test scores.

Why do passing rates vary so much state to state?
Some states have set standards well above what was the norm, but others have not.

Texas has reading standards at the 25th percentile, so, no wonder, the first year the test was used, 75 percent passed.

Here in Colorado, there were not going to be any individual student consequences, so teacher groups set ambitious standards. Some of these teachers feel burned now that the schools are being bashed with the test results.

Some people say that what was the average score should be the goal for all children. That's admirable, but it's a tall order. You can't just announce that everyone will be above average and start beating up on schools for not reaching that goal.

Even within states, there are differences in the standards. Colorado's reading standard was set right at the median, while the writing standard was set at the 70th percentile.

When half of the students tested proficient in reading, but only 30 percent in writing, people said, "We're not teaching writing." But that was predictable because the writing standard was far above the reading standard. These two passing rates don't have any comparative meaning, but the media thinks they do because they're both called "proficiency."

How should these tests be used?
I have always been strongly in favor of large-scale assessment programs like the National Assessment of Educational Progress to track trends over time. For example, during desegregation in the South, you could see that the gap between Blacks and whites was really closing.

But they shouldn't be used to test every student, every year, in a program that's driven from the statehouse.

What problems do you see with the way the tests are now being used?
Politicians believe test scores are a measure of the quality of education, rather than of resources and the students' socioeconomic characteristics. You see them rewarding the Beverly Hills school districts, even though, when you mention it, they say, "Oh, yes, we know that these kids started out ahead."

Another problem is that an external test can't be used to guide instruction because it's not there when you need it.

A test that's useful for instruction has to be right in the middle of the learning process. Good teachers who open a standardized test booklet would know in advance which problems their students can do and which they can't.

The most important thing we should be doing is working on forms of classroom assessment—that's what I really care about. That means not just picking right answers, but open-ended tasks where students show what they understand.

But external, high-stakes tests are driving out quality classroom assessment. I've used Darth Vader and the Death Star to convey the idea that these tests are looming over and threatening our classroom practice.

What are test experts doing to be heard on this?
Last July, the American Educational Research Association adopted a position paper setting out 12 conditions for sound and fair high-stakes testing programs.

The first is, "Decisions that affect individual students' life chances or educational opportunities should not be made on the basis of test scores alone." And the second, paraphrasing, is that penalties shouldn't be imposed on students until there is assurance of an opportunity to learn what is required.

In the past, courts have turned to AERA standards. When there are challenges to high-stakes tests, these standards may have some legal weight.

What would you do if you were a teacher and your state imposed a test for your students?
First, I would make sure my kids were learning the content. Then, I might spend one day with them looking at the test format, so they wouldn't be caught off guard or surprised.

But I would not teach to the test in a narrow way. Our research shows that if you focus on teaching to one test format, and then you give a different test—not a harder test, just a different format—kids lose about 20 to 30 percent.

What if you felt the test was unfairly difficult?
The school can help parents understand the test is unfairly difficult by showing samples of student work for each proficiency level. If you can't release the actual student response to a test item, you can still show other samples of what students at each level can do. So I would show that work.

And not just to parents. We also need to connect with the broader community. That may mean putting sample student work in newspapers—not just prize-winning work, but essays and sample problems at several levels of proficiency.

I did something like that with a school board near Boulder. Board members were upset by reports of students failing, so we gave them student papers at each level. The level called "partially proficient" counted as failing, but those kids wrote wonderful stories! The board members certainly didn't think those kids were illiterate, and they were up in arms.

Another idea—the school boards association sponsored this with a newspaper—was "Take The Test Day," to let people see what it was like. Our governor refused to take the test.

We need to speak to the public about these things. ✔

RESOURCES

- *The AERA Position Statement Concerning High-Stakes Testing in Pre-K-12 Education*, www.aera.net/about/policy/stakes.htm.
- *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, jointly developed by the AERA, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, which are the three major American organizations of experts in testing. Order forms are available at www.aera.net/products/standards.htm. Or call (800) 628-4094. $31.95. (The AERA's new position paper is based on this document.)
- *The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture*, by Lorrie Shepard, in ER Online. Go to http://www.aera.net/pubs/er/index.htm and look in the October 2000 archive.
- E-mail Lorrie Shepard: Lorrie.Shepard@Colorado.edu.

Teaching Africa In U.S. Schools

A Maryland teacher creates a K-12 resource

Africa remains the most poorly taught region of the world in U.S. schools, says NEA member **Brenda Randolph.** That's why Randolph, a media specialist at the Silver Spring International Middle School in Maryland, has created the *Africa Access Review*, an online journal that reviews and annotates more than 800 materials on Africa for K-12 classrooms.

"My awareness as a global citizen began with children's books," says Randolph, who remembers when one mother literally threw a book at her. That book, a work filled with disparaging stereotypes about Africa, had been given to the mother's child to read.

"That's when I went from being a passive librarian," says Randolph, "to being an activist."

Now Randolph is challenging cultural stereotypes by exposing teachers to accurate, balanced information about the African continent. Her Internet-based journal reflects the cooperative efforts of over 80 different African studies scholars in the United States and abroad.

"Much of what is taught about Africa is based on old Western icons," says Randolph. "But Africa is about people, not animals and huts."

Kids can learn more about these people through a variety of activities, she adds. Elementary kids can engage in a Taste of Africa festival. Seventh graders can learn about African cultural renaissances. Seniors can explore the global economic connections of cotton production.

In collaboration with the African Studies Association, Randolph has also created the Children's Africana Book Awards, to honor outstanding authors and illustrators of books about Africa published in the United States.

For More: Visit the Africa Access Web site at www.mcps.k12.md.us/specialprojects/africa_access/.

Sandy Schaeffer

Brenda Randolph

A Passion For Labor History?

Jim Green, *a labor historian at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, is committed to building a more just society, and he believes the story of labor's past can inspire people to act today. Over the course of a career that reaches back to the 1960s, Green has found ways to tell that story outside the ivory tower.*

Most professors stick to classrooms. How about you?

I have a classroom, too, but I've also worked on documentaries like *The Great Depression* and *Eyes On The Prize*, and on parks, museums, and celebrations of historical events, where people can see and feel the movements that brought us the eight-hour work day, Social Security, and the weekend.

Is there more interest in labor history than there used to be?

People seem to be hungry to connect to social change, and electoral politics is not capturing that interest.

Labor history shows how people can make their own history. In our history, there have been a lot of wrongs committed against people. Some of those were righted, and not by people waiting for elected officials to create reforms. People created social movements that compelled those reforms. Civil rights wasn't only a court case.

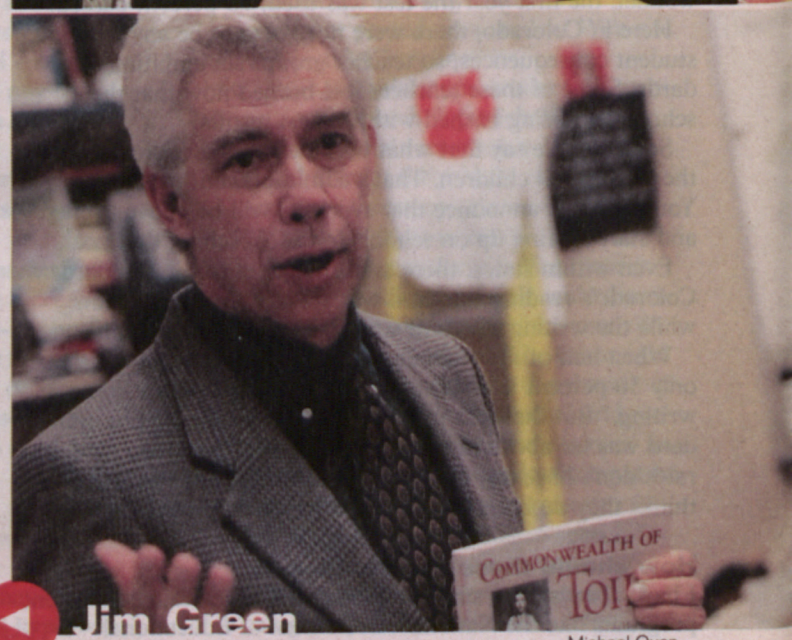
If workers hadn't organized, we wouldn't have the rights and protection on the job or the standard of living we have today.

How have you worked with teachers?

Many teachers want to teach labor history, and they have opportunities to do so—for example, Labor Day, other holidays and anniversaries, International Women's Day, and so on.

Usually, teachers don't want university people to provide curriculum. What they want is resources—books, tapes, photos—not lesson plans. And there are a lot of good materials available now.

For More: E-mail Green at james.green@ems.umb.edu. Order his recent book, *Taking History to Heart*, for $15.96 plus s&h at www.nea.org/0101/innov.html. Green recommends *Who Built America?*, which can be ordered at www.ashp.cuny.edu/index.html, and the Bread and Roses Cultural Heritage Project at www.bread-and-roses.com/index.html.



Jim Green

Michael Quan

Tom Strickland

Shop Class In the 21st Century

Innovator:
Michael Fitzgerald

Job: Technology educator, Driver Middle School, Winchester, Indiana

Bright idea: Few adults understand how a bridge or a house is put together and why they don't collapse. That's because they haven't taken Michael Fitzgerald's "Technology Education" class. In what used to be called "shop," Fitzgerald teaches children how the world around them works.

"It's not 'this is a piece of wood, or metal, and this is what you can make from it,'" says Fitzgerald. "We're modeling the real world."

Fitzgerald has students assemble a 16-foot geodesic dome and an equally large model of a bridge, both from scrap plywood.

"I can't take my students outside to build a house," he explains, "but I can model the concepts behind framing in my classroom."

With only $5 per student for materials, Fitzgerald scrounges a lot in construction dumpsters.

"My friends call it, 'trash technology,'" he says.

Fitzgerald's approach involves more science and math than traditional "shop" and, in the process, helps students reach high academic standards. His students learn about gear ratios and pulleys, study the aerodynamics of dragsters in a wind tunnel, and observe how energy can be transformed.

Shop, traditionally, was a boys' subject, while the girls went off to cook and sew. But Fitzgerald says he designs teaching units that can appeal equally to both.

Impact: Fitzgerald has taught 2,000 students a basic understanding of the technology around them.

For More: E-mail Fitzgerald at m.fitzgerald @juno.com or visit www.techdirections.com. Check the Web site of the International Technology Education Association at www.iteawww.org.

Alba Carreras

Learning Goes the Distance

Innovator:
Beverly Bower

Job: Assistant professor of higher education, Florida State University in Tallahassee

Bright idea: "Student demands and rapid advances in technology have led to a rise in distance learning," says NEA member Beverly Bower, who, as an expert consulted on NEA's recent *Survey of Traditional and Distance Learning*, is making sure that students—and educators—don't suffer from it.

"Today's college student isn't necessarily 18 years old, fresh out of high school, and taking classes on campus," says Bower. "And the range of subjects that lend themselves to distance learning is a lot wider than people think."

In Florida, for example, students going for a degree in veterinary technology can now complete classwork online, then connect with local vets for hands-on experience.

"Distance learning" can include correspondence courses, "bag courses" where students pick up videos to watch, interactive teleconferences, and Internet-based synchronous discussions via chat rooms, E-mail, and message boards.

Class sizes in distance learning situations vary widely. Some parallel traditional courses.

A poll of 400-plus NEA higher education members has found that one in 10 teaches a distance learning course and that 90 percent indicate that such courses are offered or being considered at their institutions.

"The survey acknowledges the commitment faculty make in distance learning and the amount of time it requires," Bower says.

The survey also confirms that such classes have high completion rates and attract nearby students.

"Students love the convenience," says Bower.

And staff are also enthusiastic, but, Bower adds, "there are still some areas —such as the question of fair compensation—that need to be worked out.

For More: Download NEA's *Survey of Traditional and Distance Learning* at www.nea.org/he/abouthe/dlstudy.pdf

Scott Suchman

NEA Produces Crisis Communication Guide for Educators

Innovator: Becky Fleischauer

Job: NEA Communications staffer

Bright Idea: Becky Fleischauer has developed the *NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit* to help educators deal constructively with their students, the community, and the media in the face of crisis and tragedy.

Fleischauer has had first-hand experience with crisis aftermath. After the school shooting in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999, the NEA local affiliate, the Jefferson County Education Association, asked her to come out and help members deal with the media.

"I was struck by the immensely powerful acts of compassion and generosity and the activities to foster healing and a sense of community," says Fleischauer. "The teachers, school staff, and local Association were there for their students and community in important ways."

"When Hurricane Floyd hit later that year," Fleischauer notes, "we saw the same thing."

Fleischauer has captured the best crisis practices and tools and compiled them into four books: *Being Prepared: Before a Crisis*, *Being Responsive: During a Crisis*, *Being Diligent: Moving Beyond Crisis*, and *Hands-on Assistance: Tools for Educators*.

"We've learned that interviews with children immediately following a traumatic event are damaging," says Fleischauer. "Children involved in a traumatic event need to talk with a counselor, not a reporter."

How to deal constructively with media is another lesson offered in this new NEA guide, which has received the International Association of Business Communicators Silver Inkwell award.

For More: The *NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit* is available to read free on the NEA Web site. Point your Web browser to www.nea.org/crisis/.

Technology Adventures for Girls

Fifth and sixth grade girls excel in a science technologies program that demonstrates how science impacts their lives.

The 28 girls in Colleen Briner-Schmidt's after-school math and science program in Newbury Park, California, some 50 miles north of Los Angeles, are busting preconceived notions—about girls and science in general and themselves in particular.

Through Newbury Park's bilingual Science Technologies Adventures and Research (STAR) after-school program, these fifth and sixth graders are, says Briner-Schmidt, learning that "it's cool to like science and math."

The program combines engaging projects with mentoring—and also teaches girls they can control their own lives.

"The girls from our school are at risk for even finishing school," says Briner-Schmidt, a K-1 teacher at Conejo Elementary. "We want to teach them the power of one—that they have to do it for themselves, that they have to choose how they're going to live."

Held every Thursday after school, STAR taps the help of mentors from nearby Moorpark College to help girls see how choices they make today affect the quality and quantity of choices they make later.

The mentors help the girls with hands-on science and math projects, chaperone campus field trips, role play historical women scientists during weekend retreats, and serve as real-life role models.

"If you want to engage girls in math and science, you've got to show them what it means and how it's going to help them in the real world," says Briner-Schmidt, who has been awarded an Eleanor Roosevelt grant from the AAUW Educational Foundation to help fund the project.

"It's real important," adds Briner-Schmidt, "that there's meaning behind what they do."

The STAR program draws students in by having them "do the math"—in the form of career planning that asks girls "How do you want to live?" rather than "What do you want to do?"

In a beginning exercise, girls define the lifestyle they desire, then budget for a house, car, utilities, food, clothing, and insurance to figure out what income each girl needs to support how she wants to live.

Using Department of Labor statistics, the girls then look at careers that pay that income and figure out what kind of education they need to attain those careers. Graphing all this out shows the girls that many careers traditionally

Susan Goldman

Colleen Briner-Schmidt gets girls to focus on how math and science relate to their lives and can influence their careers.

Idea Exchange

Removable Hooks

I have painted cinder blocks for walls and found that the backing for the 3M removable hooks works great to hang up laminated posters. The hook tape is similar to double-stick tape but has a pull-tab that releases the tape from the wall and the poster. It doesn't pull the paint off the walls, and I don't have to worry about my posters falling down. I just buy packets of the tape, since the hooks are reusable.

Christy Goodney
Dripping Springs, Texas

Swapped Papers

On the day that my students turn in a major paper, I have a mini-conference with each of them as they hand in the paper. I take a minute or two to skim the paper, checking to see that it has all of the required elements. As I spot problems, I tell the student what I see that could be done better.

I say that the paper is on time and I will accept it, but they can swap me a corrected copy the next day if they want to fix the things that I noticed needed correcting.

Ninety percent of my students bring in a paper to swap the next day. I love this, because they do a rewrite even before I have put a pencil to their papers. When I do grade them, they are easier to correct because the obvious problems are no longer present. And the students are happy, because their grades are based on the swapped paper, not the one that came in the first day.

Sue Schmitt
Antioch, Illinois

Dr. Seuss Goes Sports

Our school chose the theme "Dr. Seuss Goes Sports for Read Across America" last year. Each room had the month of February to submit a collective single story of Dr. Seuss in some sporting event.

On March 2—the nationwide Read Across America celebration day—a representative from each classroom read their class story at a school assembly.

Janet Keohane
Beach, North Dakota

Works4Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? Fax it to *NEA Today* at 202/822-7206 or E-mail: ideas@neatoday.nea.org. For more tips from NEA's weekly E-mail service, Works4Me, send an E-mail to lyris@list.nea.org.

- In the "subject" line, type: sign me up, NEA!
- In the message block, type: subscribe Works4Me
- Send the message.

To submit a tip, E-mail it to: owner-Works4Me@list.nea.org.

pursued by women may not get them where they want to go.

In the weeks that follow, the girls conduct a variety of experiments that cultivate problem-solving skills and expose them to career possibilities.

The students, for instance, extract DNA from kiwi fruit and build and launch pencil rockets. They record the scientific protocol required to test the strength and absorbency of paper towels. On weekend retreats, they map animal movements and go on nature walks with women rangers. They build robots using NASA-type software.

Most of all, they build confidence.

"When it comes to science, boys usually run toward equipment, girls hang back," says Briner-Schmidt, who sees an entirely different dynamic at festivals where her girls demonstrate their work. "At last year's microscope festival, I saw guys come up to them and say, 'Can you help me do this?'"

"We ask girls 'How do you want to live?' instead of 'What do you want to do?'"

—Colleen Briner-Schmidt, on the STAR science technologies after-school program

Reaching girls early is the key.

"Society tells girls that math and science are not okay," says Briner-Schmidt. "Through STAR, we've noticed more interest in attending college, greater consistency in getting homework done, and increases in overall attendance."

Parents, meanwhile, are writing thank-you letters noting that their girls are thinking more about their futures.

The future is looking brighter, too, for Conejo Elementary, a school with the highest non-English-speaking student population in the region. Dubbed two years ago a "bottom 200 school in the state," the school last year saw test scores jump 212 percent, the largest increase in the county.

STAR has been credited with contributing to that success, and Briner-Schmidt now has additional funding to expand the program, thanks to help from a Toyota Time Grant and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. ✔

—Michelle Y. Green

For more: E-mail Colleen Briner-Schmidt at cbrinerschmidt@juno.com. For program and grant information, visit the American Association of University Women at www.aauw.org and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics at www.nctm.org.

[DILEMMA]

How do you bring a transfer student up to speed?

From the start of the year, anticipating the arrival of new students later on, I put any important papers—the course overview, major assignments completed—in a separate folder. By organizing the information for that student, you have hopefully removed some of the anxiety and fear of attending a different school.

I believe it is extremely important for the incoming student not to feel overwhelmed with new information. If new students see that their teachers have prepared for their arrival, they'll better understand that staff expect a smooth transition.

I also assign peer mentors to shadow the new students until they become more familiar with the procedures and operations that guide the classroom.

It's also important to establish communication with the parents or guardians and inform them about any major adjustments—state-mandated testing, district or state policies—that you anticipate will affect their child.

Jim Orr
Middle school teacher
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

■ Encourage a buddy system to help new students get used to a new school. Allow the buddy to talk to the new student anytime during the day for about a week. Usually, by then, the new student knows the routines.

The buddy can help with how to organize a paper, when to turn in work, how to organize the homework notebook, and more.

Encourage the buddy to show the new student around the building, and what to do at lunch, in the bus room, and during planning periods.

Carole Wright Kinard
Fourth grade teacher
Bridgeport, West Virginia

■ You need to begin immediate assessment of the child's skill level. If the child is being transferred locally, staff can contact the last teacher.

If the child is from out of state, it often takes months for the child's personal file to arrive. That can cause quite a setback, especially if the student is in need of special services.

I'd encourage teachers to give a diagnostic test, possibly the one given at the beginning of the year, to see if the child is up to par, needs remediation, or can proceed to advanced studies.

After that testing, a teacher can help tutor the child in class, offer peer assistance, or send materials home so that parents can become active participants in the child's education.

Bonnie McMoran
Seventh grade English and reading teacher
Boise, Idaho

■ As soon as I learn that I'll be getting a new student, I prepare a kit. It includes a manila folder with a letter from me describing the course, explaining my grading system, detailing routines specific to my classroom, and summing up the unit we're currently studying.

I keep a general copy of this letter saved on my computer—all I do is change the letter by adding the new student's name and the section describing the unit we're studying at the time.

Cynthia Lloyd
Seventh grade language arts teacher
Princess Anne, Maryland

■ I start each year with a beginning-of-the-year checklist for each student. It's easy to print another copy and have a few responsible kids gather materials and make folders for the new child, so that the new classmate's desk is ready upon arrival.

Tracy Ajello
Fifth grade teacher
Cheshire, Connecticut

Got an Answer:

How do you get students to do their homework?

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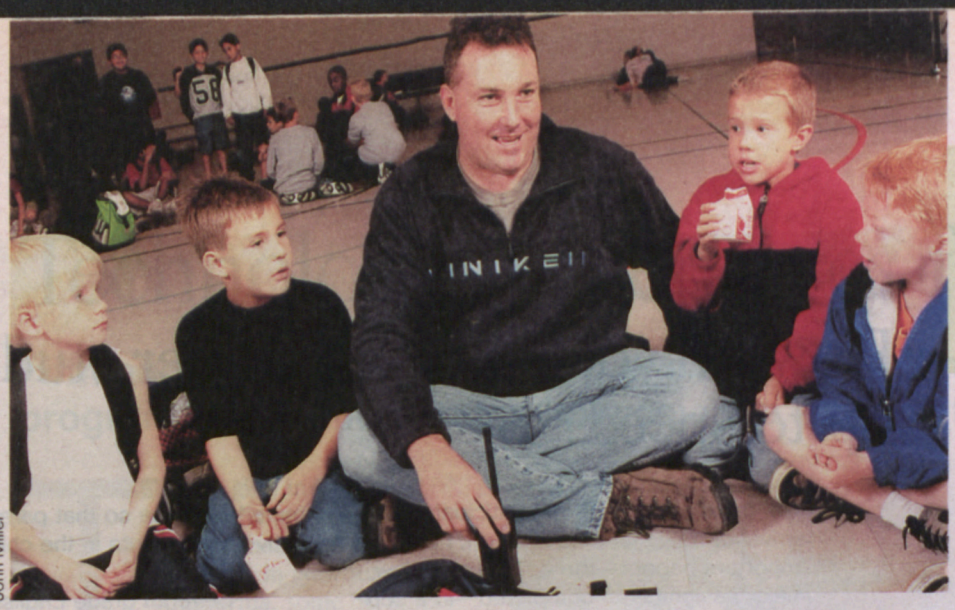
—Lawrence Asrilant, middle school science teacher, Palmdale, California



John Miller

In Mesa, Arizona, facilities assistant Frank Hunter keeps kids out of trouble after school by keeping them busy in the Kids Can program.

The Neighborhood Becomes Friendly

In a high-crime area, a school shows local residents the good that kids can do, especially if adults take an interest.

A few years back, residents of Mesa, Arizona, feared that a new school in their neighborhood would lead to scores of kids hanging out in the late afternoon. Today, sure enough, at the new Kerr Elementary, up to 300 students a day do "hang out."

But you won't find many anxious local residents. That's because the after-school attraction for the students isn't trouble. It's the 39 after-school clubs, on everything from pompoms to practical science, offered through Kerr's imaginative Kids Can program.

In fact, residents who once regarded kids with a certain distrust and disdain are now actually working with them in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The Kids Can program was born in a high-crime area that offered children no parks or other diversions.

"We were told by the police that Kerr would be one of the most vandalized schools in the area," recalls Frank Hunter, the Kerr Elementary facilities assistant who coordinates Kids Can.

School staff, parents, and neighbors all agreed early on that their new school needed to offer some kind of alternative to gang life. At one point, in fact, a local house was vandalized while staff and local residents were out on a neighborhood crime walk with police.

"We were in survival mode from the very beginning," says Hunter. "As a staff, we decided we wanted to get the neighborhood involved."

To build that involvement, staff began volunteering time and donating money to set up informal clubs outside school hours—a reading club, a scrapbook club, and one for arts and crafts—but liability issues, even with permission slips, proved a problem.

But not for long. By partnering with the local parks and recreation department, the state juvenile justice division, and the school district, Hunter was able to win a United Way grant and formalize—as the Kids Can program—what had been the staff vision all along.

Kids Can, notes Hunter, has become a safe haven for students that offers academic and recreational programs. Certified teachers, paraprofessionals, and community volunteers now head 39 after-school Kids Can clubs that meet Mondays through Thursdays.

Students in the clubs play sports, learn to babysit, improve study habits, perform in dance troupes, learn about leadership, become cheerleaders, take science and history field trips, use computers, create art and music, and more.

"This program has gotten kids more involved with the neighbors," says Hunter. "Seniors who once despised kids now work with kids. Phone complaints have diminished, and kids and adults respect each other more. It's made our job easier."

How I Did It

Karen Smith
High school English teacher
Brownsville, Pennsylvania

Realizing that my students were growing bored with Shakespeare, I energized them by having them transform a modern-day movie blockbuster into a 16th-century Shakespearean production.

John Heller

My students were absolutely obsessed with James Cameron's *Titanic*. The semester that I began this project, more than 98 percent of them had seen it, making the film something that the entire group could relate to.

I decided to harness the popularity of the film to get my students to buy into the Bard.

We embarked on a project that would attempt to convert Cameron into Shakespeare. I chose three key scenes from the movie for students to recreate in a Shakespearean format. For this project, I chose a gambling scene, a dinner segment, and the portion of the film where a main character attempts to throw herself off the ship. With these scenes in mind, I introduced my students to Shakespearean stories that carried similar themes.

By no means was this project easy. We first discussed the movie and the history of the *Titanic*. I got a copy of an A&E special on the ship's history from my local cable company, and, with this, I did a mini-lesson on the ship. Students had to read various plays, get a feeling for Shakespeare's language and form, and then incorporate his style into the movie characters' dialogue.

Once they finished a script, I then asked students to reenact the scene for the class. My students' creative

Staffers are compensated for their time working on Kids Can, but activities are offered free of charge. And parents who help out earn one hour of credit in "parent university classes" for every hour volunteered.

"Seniors who once despised kids now work with kids."

—Frank Hunter, facilities assistant and Kids Can coordinator

Kids Can is now in its third year.

"Our numbers have just soared," notes Hunter. "Very rarely do students miss a club."

The relationships forged in Kids Can are enriching the community as well.

"Kids who had been stealing are now cutting lawns, washing dishes, and looking out for their neighbors," says Hunter.

And Mesa police have documented a significant reduction in neighborhood crime. The area around the school has gone from Mesa's number one in calls for police service to 65th. ✔

—Michelle Y. Green

For more: E-mail Frank Hunter at bxxman@msn.com.

- **Kids Can has been featured on the NEA Safe Schools Now Network. The video of the "Forging Community Alliances" broadcast, with discussion and resource guides, is available for $14.95 from the NEA Professional Library, 800/229-4200.**
- **The NEA Safe Schools program on "Addressing Bias and Hate in the School Setting: A Collaboration with the Prevention Institute" will air in February. For viewing information, visit www.safeschoolsnow.org.**

talents were revealed through their productions. Some wrote background music, many designed backgrounds, and others created costumes.

I loved the spirit the students displayed as they made their scenes come alive. Learning opportunities appeared everywhere. This turned into a unit on everything from creative writing to acting. And the cross-curricular nature of the activity kept students engaged.

I've been teaching Shakespeare in this way for the past three years, and it's been a success each time. As a teacher, I think that you need to do your best to meet your students wherever they are. Next semester, we're thinking of doing this project with *The Outsiders*.

[DILEMMA]

How do you help students build a greater sense of respect for each other?

My students are seated not in rows, but in groups of four called "neighborhoods." These neighborhoods change with each marking period. Students learn in this setting to work cooperatively, help each other, and treat each other with the same respect they would show a neighbor. I use the neighbor concept constantly during the class period.

On a silly note: When one student is rude to another, the student must sing the Mr. Rogers "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" song. Students are quick to realize that they must show each other respect in my classroom.

Isabel Montick
High school math teacher
Verona, New Jersey

■ I use a symbol to represent respect in the classroom, an idea that I've borrowed from my mentor teacher. Each student receives an M&M, and we each place our M&M in a glass jar. By doing this, we acknowledge one another as individuals.

The jar is then visible throughout the year, and I occasionally make reference to it if I believe respect is not being shown for another person's thoughts and ideas.

I've found that the students regard this not as a ridiculous reminder, but as a serious representation of the respect that they will nurture and show toward each other. Students often have come to visit me to discuss how "the jar" made them think twice about putting someone else down.

Jason Marvel
High school English teacher
Rock Springs, Wyoming

■ Educators have an incredible opportunity to encourage respect and help students learn to honor the opinions and abilities of all. If we model respectful interactions and remind students to do so as well, we'll soon see a "respect wave" cruising through our classrooms.

Students are more socially and globally aware than ever, and they no longer simply give respect due to age, position, or relative power. To build a more respectful society in the future, we need to provide an honest, open, and energizing atmosphere in our schools now.

Pam Westbrook
Fourth grade teacher
Yokosuka, Japan

■ The way to build respect in students is to let them know who you are and to get to know who they are. Allow students time to get to know each other before asking them to work in teams, so that cultural conflicts are less likely to occur. Students need to learn to recognize cultural differences before we can ask them to be sensitive to them.

Classroom rules should then be clearly established and lines drawn. Children can handle rules as long as they're enforced the same way with every child. That's one way educators can demonstrate respect—by backing up their beliefs with behavior.

Pamela Galus
High school earth science teacher
Omaha, Nebraska

■ Be a positive role model. Show respect to your students and celebrate their diversity. Set appropriate limits and stick to them. Listen to student concerns and give them the decision-making skills to make healthy life choices.

Help guide students to their full potential. And, most of all, let them know you are also human.

Bonnie Sue Shrock
High school social sciences teacher/
Peer counseling adviser
San Diego, California

Got An Answer?

How can you get publicity for your school's success stories?

E-mail your answer to dilemma2@neatoday.nea.org. Or send by regular mail, or fax to 202/822-7206. Please include your name, city, state, and job title. Published respondents will receive an *NEA Today* mug!

Ted Pitts

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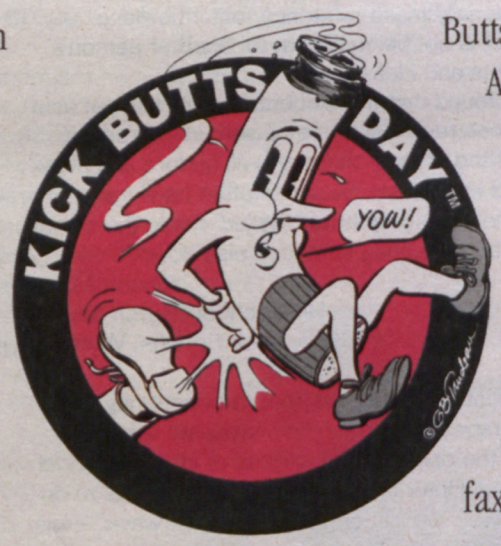

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Taking Reading to Task

For nearly a century, students have been caught in the crossfire of the reading wars. NEA's Task Force on Reading 2000 aims to make all students successful readers with new Guidelines for Effective Reading Instruction.

When NEA convened its Task Force on Reading 2000, the mission was clear.

"Our charge was to create a set of comprehensive guidelines, based on research and practice, that our members could use to help improve reading instruction," says Robin Nettinga, a task force member and president of the Idaho Education Association.

"We needed to move past the debate about whole language versus phonics," says Nettinga, "and talk about reading instruction, not as a balanced program, but as a complete program."

Written by teachers for teachers, the new report, which was released last March by the Task Force, addresses the entire realm of literacy.

"Our report," explains Nettinga, "stresses that there's no one-size-fits-all answer to the successful teaching of reading and that all children need to be approached from where they are and taken where they need to be."

The NEA Task Force on Reading included 11 expert teachers. Among them: Andy Baumgartner, the 1999 National Teacher of the Year, and Carolyn Olson, a Christa McAuliffe Award winner.

The fruit of their labor, *The Report of the NEA Task Force on Reading 2000*, sets forth 10 guidelines that address program development, materials selection, instructional support and assessment, collaboration and communication, and policy.

To help frame its recommendations, the task force drew upon the expertise of national literacy education groups such as the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English.

"Teachers need a lot of tools to reach every child," says Nettinga. "There are more than just two approaches to reading instruction. The approach we took and the decisions we made will help define the importance of reading for our members and define how we talk about reading as a program."

The report features a variety of resource references, such as NEA's Reading Matters Web site (www.nea.org/readingmatters), and offers seven action recommendations that can help NEA members plan classroom instruction and help NEA state affiliates influence state reading policy.

Many of the task force recommendations, says Nettinga, are already being implemented.

"In Idaho, we've developed a listserv of nearly 500 teachers to help disseminate information on reading," she says. "It's an incredible resource." ✔

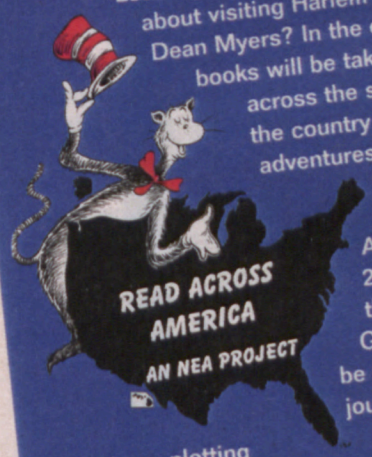
For more: E-mail Robin Nettinga at Rnettinga@nea.org. Download the NEA Reading Task Force report at www.nea.org/readingmatters/expert/tfrfinal.pdf.

Pam Benham

NEA Reading Task Force member Robin Nettinga, a middle school teacher, believes that it's time to move beyond the whole language versus phonics debate and start discussing which reading methods work best for each student.

Oh, The Places You Can Go!

Would you like to spend a Morning in Maine with author Robert McCloskey or a Smoky Night in Los Angeles with Eve Bunting? How about visiting Harlem with Walter Dean Myers? In the coming year, books will be taking students across the street or across the country in reading adventures designed to coincide with NEA's Read Across America 2001 theme, "Oh, the Places You'll Go." Students will be creating travel journals for literary excursions, plotting their progress on maps, and celebrating with regional foods and music. Looking for more ideas? Log on to www.nea.org/readacross.



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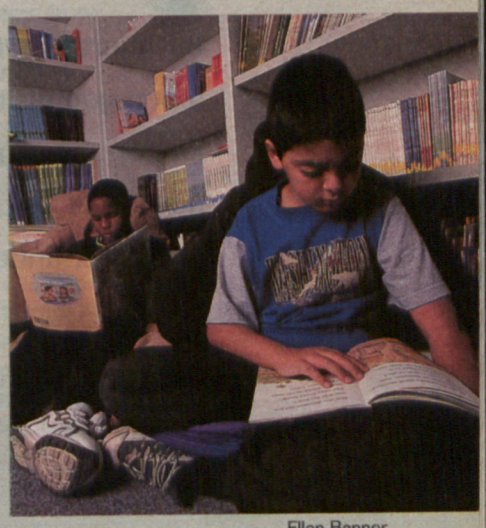
HOW TO... KEEP BOYS INTERESTED IN BOOKS

"With extra encouragement and role modeling, boys can learn to become avid readers," says Kathleen Odean, children's librarian and author of *Great Books for Boys* (Ballantine Books, 1998). Chair of the American Library Association's Newbery Awards Committee for 2001, Odean shares these strategies to keep boys interested in books.

- Boys tend to be more interested than girls in nonfiction. Incorporate quality nonfiction into read-aloud time, class projects, and book fairs.
- Allow boys to see men as active readers to overcome the perception that reading is uncool. Invite men as visiting readers and promote the idea of men giving books as gifts.
- Use the first book in a high-quality series for read aloud to jumpstart reluctant readers into the next book.
- The sports page is a remarkably advanced form of reading and math. Explore and encourage the use of magazines and newspapers for pleasure reading.
- Popular genres for boys include mystery, adventure, survival, sports fiction and nonfiction, fantasy, and biography.
- Expose boys to high-interest topics such as the *Titanic* and the Olympics by showing photographs and artifacts, then point them to books to find out more.
- A recommendation from a peer has power. Keep a "rolodex" of short reviews kids have written, and give them opportunities to talk about books they've enjoyed.

For more: E-mail Kathleen Odean at kodean@compuserve.com.



Ellen Banner

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A Nation at Risk?

American kids know at least as much as they did in any Good Old Days, and probably more.

Back in 1983, A Nation At Risk, the landmark study commissioned and avidly promoted by the Department of Education under President Ronald Reagan, charged that a "rising tide of mediocrity" was threatening the nation's economic future. The economy was indeed in poor shape at the time, and the charge stuck. Today's economy is roaring along at record levels, but commentators still assume that students aren't learning as well as they once did. What's the real story?

How do students today compare with those of past generations?
Our best measure is the testing conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called "the Nation's Report Card." NAEP started about 30 years ago, and, since then, reading and math scores have shown gradual improvement, more in math than in reading. Science scores declined for a decade but have bounced back.

What about minority students? Aren't their scores down?
White, African American, and Hispanic students are all doing better today than they did 30 years ago on the NAEP, and that goes for almost every age and subject tested. The gap between minority student scores and white student scores is smaller today than it was in the early 1970s. But the gap stopped shrinking in the late 1980s and now stands a little bigger than in 1990.

Black and Hispanic student scores have been basically flat since then, with white student scores up slightly.

Why do so many people think schools have gotten worse?
Two reasons: nostalgia and slander.

People tend to think the "golden years" of education coincided with whatever years they attended school. *New York Times* columnist Richard Rothstein, a research associate at the Economic Policy Institute, documented this phenomenon in his 1998 book *The Way We Were?*

Observers have been bemoaning the decay of our schools, it turns out, since the 19th century, despite a distinct absence of evidence.

In recent decades, the public schools have also been subjected to an especially heavy pounding of false information.

Ideological critics of public education, for instance, seized upon A Nation At Risk as proof that America's schools were failing miserably. But, in fact, the authors of *A Nation At Risk* acknowledged a much more complicated reality.

"It is important, of course, to recognize that *the average citizen* today," they wrote, "is better educated and more knowledgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago—more literate, and exposed to more mathematics, literature, and science."

"Nevertheless," the authors added, "*the average graduate* of our schools and colleges today is not as well educated."

In other words, what has changed is that American high schools are now doing something never before accomplished: educating the great majority of young people, not just the elite.

What about SAT scores. Aren't they way down?
SAT scores bottomed out about 20 years ago for math and about 10 years ago on the verbal test. But the scores are now creeping upward, especially in math.

But SAT scores are not nearly as high as they were in 1941, when the test was first given. And how could they be? In 1941, Richard Rothstein points out, less than half of 1 percent of the nation's 17-year-olds took the SAT. Most were prep school boys trying to get into Ivy League colleges.

Last year, about 27 percent of the nation's 17-year-olds took the SAT.

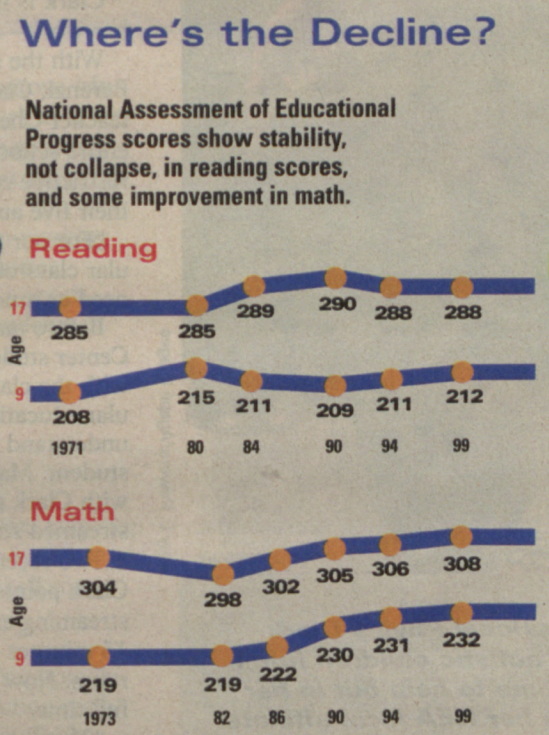
SAT scores don't show the achievement of the average student. They reflect who's taking the test.

Are schools adequately preparing Americans for the new economy?
American students could and should be better prepared by the schools. But American workers are as productive as any in the world, and our economy is doing much better than those of our most feared competitors of the 1980s, Japan and Germany. If the schools were to blame for hard times under Ronald Reagan, why aren't schools getting any credit for the economic turnaround today?

So, are schools doing just fine?
Of course not. We face enormous problems—as did earlier generations. We can do better, and we know how: with smaller classes, more prep time and professional development for teachers, and social policies that reduce child poverty.

What won't improve schools one whit is mythologizing either the past or the present. ✔

—Alain Jehlen



Tammy Smith

For more: Visit the NAEP Web site at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ site. Good books include *The Way We Were?* by Richard Rothstein, *The Manufactured Crisis* by David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, and *Setting the Record Straight* by Gerald Bracey.

TEAMWORK

Michigan Para Sets Steady Course

Phyllis Clark has the same goal that all educators do—to help her students succeed. But 'success' has a special meaning for the autistic students in Clark's classroom.

Amy E. Powers/Agapé Images

Michigan paraprofessional Phyllis Clark finds her work with autistic children fulfilling. She also finds time to help out in her community and with her NEA local affiliate.

Working with autistic children is a challenge that many would find daunting. But not paraprofessional Phyllis Clark.

Clark now works with five autistic-impaired students in the Learning Center at Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary in Flint, Michigan.

It's work Clark knows well. For the past 16 years, she has been with the Genesee Intermediate School District, a special education district that maintains Learning Centers in a number of schools in Flint.

Generally speaking, autistic children have difficulty with social interaction and communication. Their activities and interests are often restricted.

One of the biggest hurdles for autistic children, explains Clark, is learning how to control their behavior when changes occur in their environment and routines, as happens all the time in a normal school setting.

Clark's interest in special education began back when a family member was a student at one of Genesee's Learning Centers. A teacher at the center persuaded Clark to try working as a substitute, and that subbing soon led to regular employment.

Clark is now completely immersed in her work—and her Association.

With the support of principal Dan Berenzi, Clark and her close colleague, teacher Cheryl Martin, involve the entire school in providing the least restrictive education environment for their five autistic-impaired students.

"For our students to succeed in a regular classroom," explains Clark, "they need as much support as possible."

Before mainstreaming any Learning Center student, Clark and Martin work with the classroom teacher and the regular education students, helping them understand what to expect from the student. Mainstreaming starts gradually, with Clark accompanying each mainstreamed student to the new class.

Two recent Learning Center students, Clark points out, began their mainstreaming experience by spending just 15 minutes a day in a regular classroom. Now they're mainstreamed full-time.

"They've developed their social skills so well," says Clark, "that they no longer need me to accompany them."

Working with autistic students is a demanding, full-time job, but Clark finds time to take on other challenges. She's a past president of the Genesee ESP Association, a Michigan Education Association and NEA convention delegate, and an MEA ESP Board member.

Clark is particularly interested in minority issues, both within and outside the Association, especially in October. Each fall, she throws herself into organizing the celebration of Multicultural Diversity Day, which falls on the third Monday in October.

This observance, originated in Flint by NEA member Cleorah Scruggs, is now celebrated in districts all around the country.

This year's Diversity Day celebration in Flint included a gala dinner that coupled African drumming and Asian dancing for a broad turnout of community organizations and local leaders.

The fall also finds Clark organizing "Christmas in October." She'll collect clothing, books, toys, and other household items, pack the goods up, and then distribute them as presents to needy local families.

Clark is so dedicated to getting goods to people in need, says MEA UniServ Director John Van Dyken, that she collects extra bars of hotel soap from fellow Association members when they get back from out-of-area conferences.

Clark is also working hard to improve her own professional skills. Since starting work as a paraeducator, she has earned an associate's degree in childhood development/special needs and is now enrolled in early childhood development at a local university.

What's Clark's source of greatest satisfaction? The children in her classroom, she answers quickly.

"Helping students get some type of control over their lives, so that they can succeed in society, and live in the world as 'normally' as possible," sums up Clark, "is what really makes it all worthwhile." ✔

Going the Extra Mile

Kathie Axtell, a paraeducator and the president of the Educational Assistants Association, recognized early on the need for local students to have computer access outside of their classrooms in Olympia, Washington.

All that was needed, Axtell says, "was some money to make the vision come true."

Axtell found that money—by winning a $7,500 grant from the Washington Education Association to help build the Evergreen Villages Neighborhood Center.

Dozens of local elementary, junior high, and high school students now have access to new computers and high-speed Internet connections.

Students can even save files onto a computer linked directly to the Olympia schools. The center also

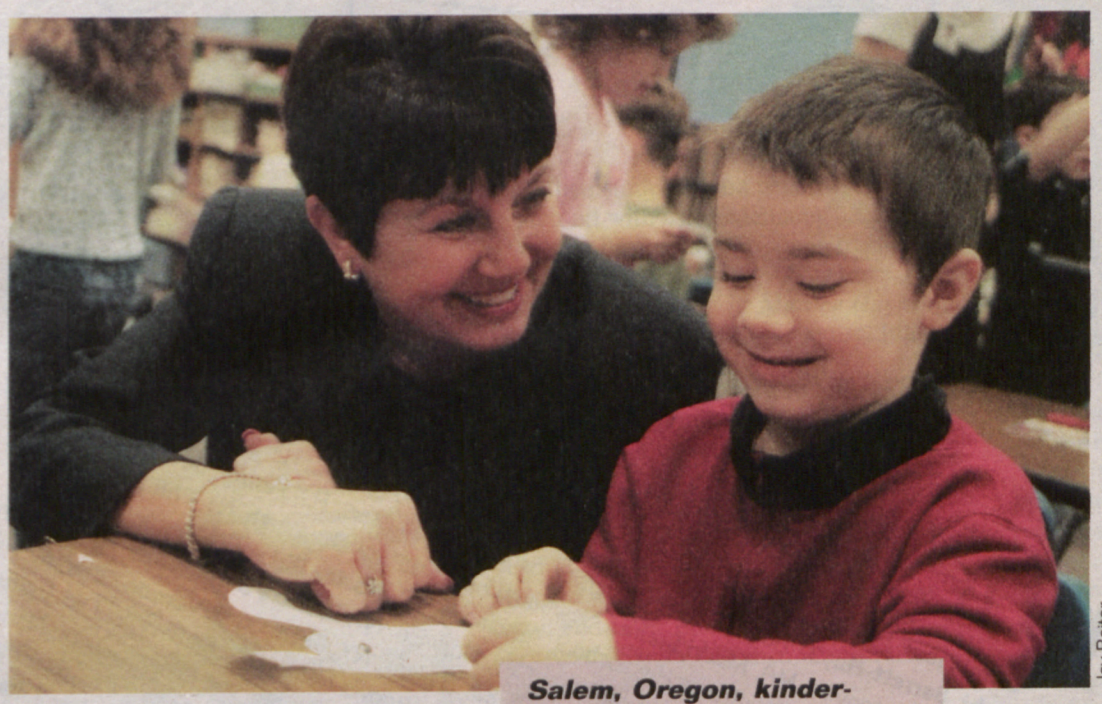
TEAM PLAYER

Someone Has To Do It, Well

Name: **Rhody Deetz**
Job Title: Kindergarten aide at Pringle Elementary School in Oregon's Salem-Keizer Unified School District
Association Positions: I am currently Pringle's building representative and an executive board member within the Salem Education Association as instructional assistant director.

This year, I was asked to serve as a delegate to our state and national Association Representative Assemblies. After attending the NEA Representative Assembly in Chicago, I felt empowered and I'm really excited about the new initiatives that we discussed.
Motivations for becoming involved: When I first became a building rep, it was because no one else was going to take on the job. People worried about being intimidated in this position, but it's been an empowering, enlightening, and rewarding experience.

I really feel passionate about being involved and want to motivate other classified staff members to be active in working with teachers to improve education. We really need to work as a winning team. This position has given me the opportunity to bring information to the classified staff.
Upcoming projects: I am working on the Youth Summit Committee, which is looking to sponsor a youth summit for middle school students in the spring. The summit would help middle school students solve problems without resorting to violence. ✔



Jay Reiter

Salem, Oregon, kindergarten aide and Association activist Rhody Deetz says support staff and teachers are a winning team.

RESOURCES

Bus Driver Inspiration
It may not be easy being green, but a Connecticut bus driver suggests that it's not easy being yellow either.

On her Web site, "It's Not Easy Being Yellow," Paulette Garosshen provides inspiration, advice, and humor any bus driver could use.

One part of the site includes a tongue-in-cheek "Bus Driver's Prayer," which asks for help with the number of distractions a driver will face on any given school day. The site also offers links to bus-related resources.

You can find the site at http://pages.cthome.net/schoolbusdriver/.

News To Use
Mailshell is a Web service that provides a convenient area that can help you subscribe to a wide range of E-mail newsletters. The site can also help stop junk mail with its filtering technology. A free service. www.mailshell.com.

How Fast Is Fast?
Wonder how speedy that supposedly "fast" new Internet connection really is? A quick and easy test at CableModem.net determines the bandwidth of your cyber pipeline. See www.cablemodem.net/features/oct99/ speed.html.

All About Our Government
Here's a site that's got it all—all of the key information about the federal government, that is. The United States Government Manual, 2000/2001 has everything you probably want to know about all the departments and subunits of the federal government. You can find this useful site by putting this address into your browser: www.access.gpo.gov/nara/browse-gm00.html

Just Out From NEA
If you're having trouble navigating the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), then *The New IDEA Survival Guide* is for you.

The book's easy question-and-answer format leads you through a number of scenarios that illustrate the most pressing concerns about IDEA '97.

You'll find plenty of practical advice in the pages that you can use immediately in dealing with everything from discipline to managing paperwork.

Order from the NEA Professional Library by calling 1/800/229-4200 (ask for item #2016-2-00-F). You can also download the book free at www.nea.org/books.

offers language and cooking classes, computer workshops, and citizenship courses to all local residents.

Last July, Florida state bus driver **James Roark** won his division of the 30th School Bus Driver International Safety Competition, held in Oakland, California.

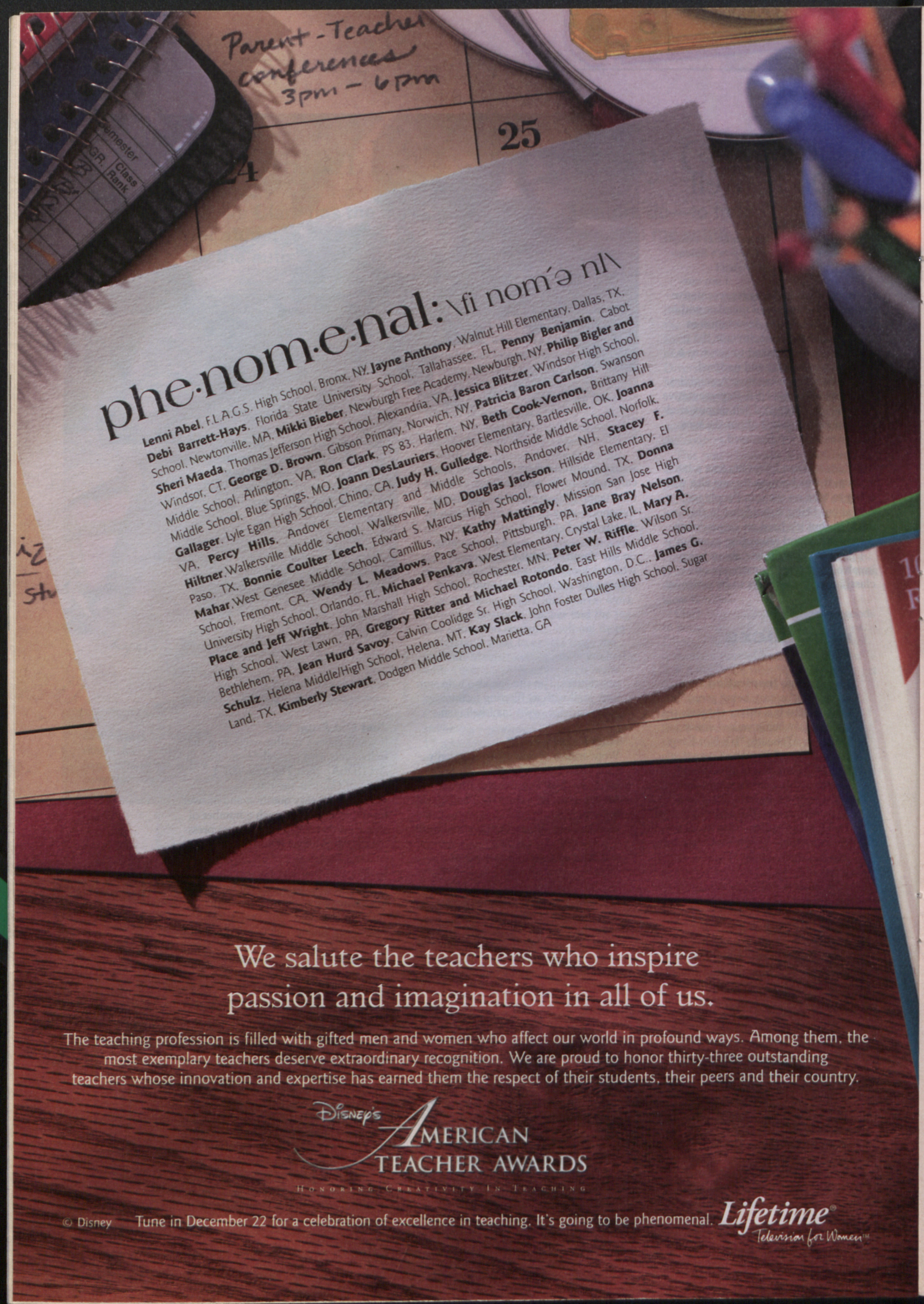
To win, Roark had to maneuver his bus through a 10-event obstacle course that included parallel parking, negotiating his bus through a tight alley, and driving around cones with a three-inch clearance. Roark also needed to complete a 40-question written test.

A member of the Seminole County School Bus Drivers Association, Roark began entering "road-e-os" in 1992, just three days after completing bus driver training. Roark now teaches new drivers how to perform well in these popular contests.

"It's gotten to the point where I sometimes like training more than I like driving in these competitions," says Roark.

Annually, about 220,000 school bus drivers take part in road-e-os at the local and state levels.

Eighty-nine drivers from the United States and Canada competed in the California competition won by Roark.


Parent-Teacher conferences 3pm – 6pm
25
24
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Lenni Abel, F.L.A.G.S. High School, Bronx, NY, Jayne Anthony, Walnut Hill Elementary, Dallas, TX, Debi Barrett-Hays, Florida State University School, Tallahassee, FL, Penny Benjamin, Cabot School, Newtonville, MA, Mikki Bieber, Newburgh Free Academy, Newburgh, NY, Philip Bigler and Sheri Maeda, Thomas Jefferson High School, Alexandria, VA, Jessica Blitzer, Windsor High School, Windsor, CT, George D. Brown, Gibson Primary, Norwich, NY, Patricia Baron Carlson, Swanson Middle School, Arlington, VA, Ron Clark, PS 83, Harlem, NY, Beth Cook-Vernon, Brittany Hill Middle School, Blue Springs, MO, Joann DesLauriers, Hoover Elementary, Bartlesville, OK, Joanna Gallager, Lyle Egan High School, Chino, CA, Judy H. Gulledge, Northside Middle School, Norfolk, VA, Percy Hills, Andover Elementary and Middle Schools, Andover, NH, Stacey F. Hiltner, Walkersville Middle School, Walkersville, MD, Douglas Jackson, Hillside Elementary, El Paso, TX, Bonnie Coulter Leech, Edward S. Marcus High School, Flower Mound, TX, Donna Mahar, West Genesee Middle School, Camillus, NY, Kathy Mattingly, Mission San Jose High School, Fremont, CA, Wendy L. Meadows, Pace School, Pittsburgh, PA, Jane Bray Nelson, University High School, Orlando, FL, Michael Penkava, West Elementary, Crystal Lake, IL, Mary A. Place and Jeff Wright, John Marshall High School, Rochester, MN, Peter W. Riffle, Wilson Sr. High School, West Lawn, PA, Gregory Ritter and Michael Rotondo, East Hills Middle School, Bethlehem, PA, Jean Hurd Savoy, Calvin Coolidge Sr. High School, Washington, D.C., James G. Schulz, Helena Middle/High School, Helena, MT, Kay Slack, John Foster Dulles High School, Sugar Land, TX, Kimberly Stewart, Dodgen Middle School, Marietta, GA

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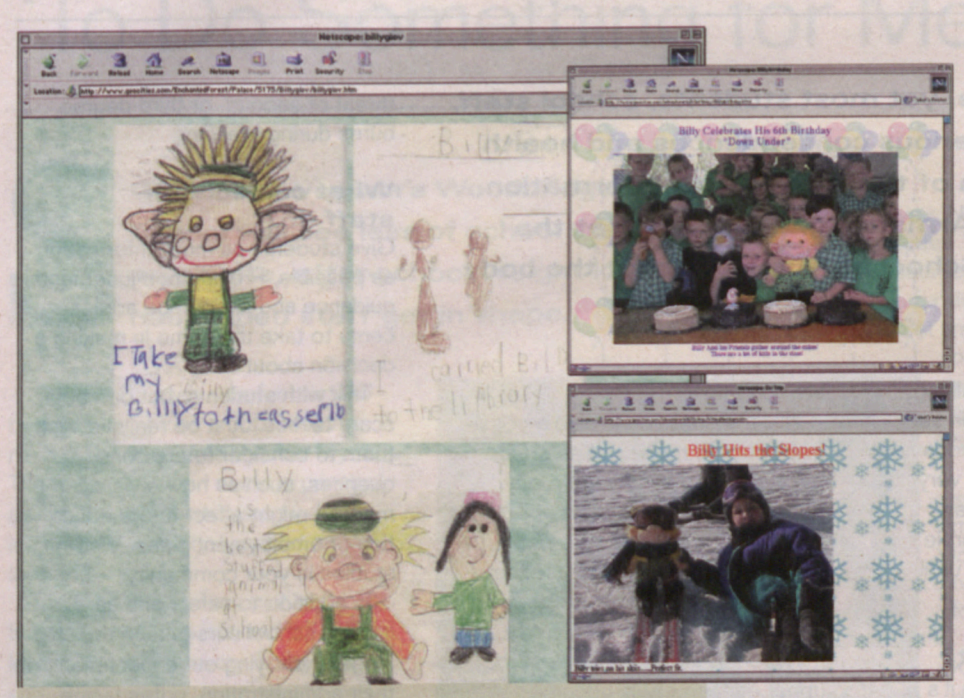
Kids Put Themselves Online



Budding student writers and artists are free to add their own material, using directions from www.geocities.com/adventurerbill.

Where Have You Gone, Billy Boy?

Writing is fun when it gets published in cyberspace! Students in our school got to see their own writing published in a project called Adventurer Billy B. Here's how it works.

Each class was given a school mascot and a digital camera. The children included the mascot in their everyday and "not so everyday" activities and then wrote short stories and language experience stories about the mascot's adventures with the class.

Students were encouraged either to write or draw pictures of their adventures with Billy the mascot. Stories were then sent via E-mail to the project coordinator, who published them along with pictures on the school's intranet.

The students were proud to see their work on the computer and will repeat the activity again this year. The project has sparked a greater interest in writing among the students. Check www.geocities.com/adventurerbill.

Grace Morina
gracemorina@home.com
Paulsboro, New Jersey

TALK TO US

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to wiredclassroom@list.nea.org.

Is there a Web site, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to myfavoritetech@list.nea.org.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by Fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

A Site for Times Tables

I have been running a Web site for the last three years to help teachers teach the times tables.

Since last January I've had over 1.5 million hits, and the site has received numerous awards. The URL is www.multiplication.com.

About.com wrote my site up as its "teacher tool of the week." The reviewer wrote: "This site offers tons of useful goodies to help reinforce the times tables. Don't miss the 'Games' section, as well as the 'Teachers' area. This is the kind of stuff you will print out and use right away!"

Alan Walker
awalker@prosserschools.org
Prosser, Washington

Going in Circles

Www.ecircles.com can become an off campus/online extension of the classroom and is recommended for secondary foreign language classes.

The membership of the class and the teacher are visible on screen in self-chosen caricatures.

While teaching Japanese Language classes, I could dialogue with individual students or communicate with the entire class at once.

We shared news articles, photos, and virtual gifts, kept journals, and dealt with individual homework questions and event notification on the calendar in Japanese.

Ecircles, and the many functions it offers, provided one more opportunity for students to participate and communicate in Japanese. This venue is an asset both for increasing proficiency and for providing the more introverted student a less threatening place to practice usage.

When students miss a class, they can catch up with assignments by accessing the site. Best of all, the site is free and fun to use.

Marilee Hayashi
Boise, Idaho

Trekking On

Go to www.ustrek.org to follow the journey of an eight-member team as they trek through U.S. history and bring back dispatches, with photos and video, to the classroom.

The itinerary is aligned with a typical U.S. history year-long curriculum. The team visits sites that are off the beaten path and bring the often overlooked people in history—women, minorities, the poor—to life.

The dispatches are well written and interesting for high school students. Plus, the group's "Making A Difference" dispatches help to excite students about making a difference in the world today. I love this site!

Sarah Jaeger
sarahjaeger@hotmail.com
Ross, California

My favorite Web site

Homeroom.com is an innovative tool that helps students improve scores on state-mandated tests and maximizes academic performance. Teachers can quickly assess student skills against state standards and re-teach as needed.

Ginny Jimenez
Special education teacher
Marriottsville, Maryland

Bytes for Beginners

I'm a middle school librarian who also manages several computers in my reading center. I overheard a group of students talking about downloading and using "shareware" software. They came to the conclusion that it was "wrong to use shareware software without paying for it." Is this true?

Give your students an A+! They are absolutely correct in assuming that it is unethical to download, keep, and use shareware software without paying for it.

When software is marketed through normal retail channels, consumers are forced to pay for it before determining if it meets their needs. Shareware is a distribution and marketing method used by some software authors, an outlet for computer software based on the "try-before-you-buy" principle.

If you like a program, then you make a registration payment to the author. If you don't want the program after trying it out, then you delete it.

Shareware programs are the same as software you find anyplace else—except that you get the opportunity to use shareware on your own computer before paying for it.

You can learn more about shareware and where to find it by visiting the following sites:

The Association of Shareware Professionals is an organization of shareware authors and distributors: www.asp-shareware.org.

The Educational Software Cooperative is a professional association of shareware authors and distributors who produce educational software. Check: www.edu-soft.org.

The Shareware Trade Association and Resources is a professional association of American and European shareware authors and distributors. See www.shareware.org.

The Piercing Reality of Body Art

The popularity of body art is on the rise, yet most students, school staff, and parents remain unaware of the serious consequences and health risks associated with it. Vicki Harrison of the NEA Health Information Network recently spoke with Myrna Armstrong, a professor at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing, about the body art phenomenon.

What is body art?

Tattoos are indelible markings of pigment placed under the skin.

Piercing involves the penetration of the body—the most commonly pierced areas of the body are the ears, nose, eyebrow, tongue, chin cleft, nipple, navel, and genitals—by a large needle to insert jewelry.

Tattooing and piercing are the most popular types of body art, with between 15 to 20 percent of students having one or the other.

Branding, implants, and scarification are more extreme and dangerous types of body art that are slowly emerging. Branding involves creating scars on the skin by striking hot pieces of metal against the body. Scarification involves cutting patterns deeply enough in the skin to create a permanent scar.

Implanting is the insertion of metal or plastic pieces of jewelry under the skin.

Why is body art popular?

Despite the potential for pain and inherent health risks, young people regard body art as a form of self-expression. When their parents were growing up, a tattoo or piercing was a sign of deviancy. To members of this generation, it's a way to assert themselves and feel unique. And it's difficult for them to understand why their parents get so upset about it.

Who's doing body art?

Body art attracts adolescents from all socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of academic achievement. In one study I conducted, 65 percent of the adolescents with tattoos were students with *A* and *B* averages.

The average age for the first tattoo was 14. The youngest tattoo enthusiast I've encountered was eight.

It's not too early to start talking about body art with children in second or third grade. Children today are exposed to body art at a very early age. They have temporary tattoos as toys, and even Barbie almost had a butterfly tattoo until parents objected.

How safe is body art?

It depends on how and where it's done and by whom.

Tattoos and piercings are done in studios, but they're also frequently done in flea markets, concerts, house fronts, cars, and vans. It's not unusual for adolescents to pierce or tattoo themselves or their friends, especially younger students who don't have the resources or parental consent that most reputable artists require for anyone under the age of 18.

Students learn from their friends, the Internet, or just get very creative on their own. Amateur brandings might be done with a red-hot coat hanger or paper clip. Amateur tattooing might be performed with crude instruments such as pencils, pens, and straight pins, using pigments such as charcoal or mascara.

Branding and scarification are extremely dangerous practices, bordering on self-mutilation. Implanting is officially considered surgery and should never be done.

Half of the states do not have health regulations governing tattooing, and only about 15 have regulated body piercing. Nationwide, there are no training requirements for these artists.

In order to find a good, responsible artist, adolescents and their parents should shop around, visit studios, and observe an artist's techniques. When shopping for a body piercer, go someplace that uses a simple, sterilized needle to complete the procedure.

What are the health risks?

Perhaps the greatest risk associated with tattooing and body piercing is the potential for the transmission of Hepatitis B, a virus that can survive on blood-contaminated surfaces for a couple of months. This is why sterile instruments and environment are so critical.

HIV transmission is also a possibility, but the risk is not as great because the virus dies at room temperature.

Body piercings are very prone to bacterial infections, because they are often not cared for properly and are often in high-bacteria areas.

Piercings in the cartilage of the upper ear can easily become infected because of bacteria in hair and the pressure applied while sleeping. Navel piercings have a 45 percent infection rate because hygiene is generally poor in that area. The friction of tight clothing like waistbands also creates a moist environment where bacteria thrive. It can take nearly a year for a navel piercing to heal sufficiently.

Adolescents must understand that if they do a body piercing, they need to maintain a continual regimen of post-piercing skin care.

Other health concerns are allergic reactions to the non-FDA-approved pigments used for tattooing and the threat of second- or third-degree burns during branding.

Eliza Gran

What can school staff do?

Give students as much information as possible. Provide non-judgmental guidance and encourage adolescents to take their time in making a decision about body art.

Talk with students, but don't use scare tactics. Just be realistic. Ask them to consider future consequences, such as how a visible marking might affect future education or employment plans. Visit studios in your community.

In addition to safety and care issues, school nurses face the challenge of carrying out expectations of their administration, notes Lynne Kelly, RN, MSN, a clinical instructor of nursing at Texas Tech and a former school nurse. But because body art's mainstream popularity is a more recent phenomenon, few school policies exist on the topic.

So questions arise for school nurses: How much leeway do they have on the preventive end? Can they educate students about body art? Can the topic be included in the school's health curriculum?

Some school districts view talking about body art as a way of promoting it. But when school nurses are permitted to educate students before they go through with a procedure, students will become aware of the risks and know what's safe. School nurses need to educate administrations and ask for guidance and support.

Body art is growing more and more popular. It's important to have a dialogue about it in every school. ✔

RESOURCES

- ***A Tattoo?...You. Teens Talking to Teens*, an eight-minute video, discusses the risks, the procedure, and tattoo removal. Available with an accompanying study guide for $55 from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing, 806/743-2002.**

- ***Taking Care of Body Piercings*, a brochure, lists risks, tips for healing, and what to look for in a piercing salon. *Body Art: Self-Test* asks the reader to ponder: Why do I want it? Is it safe? Will I regret it? Other titles include *Getting What You Want from Body Art*, *Body Art: Incredible Facts*, and *Tattoos: Incredible Facts*. Each title, $16 for 50 copies from ETR Associates 800/321-4407 (www.etr.org).**

Firming a Resolution 'To Do Something for Me'

Students at Virginia's Woodbridge Senior High School will see less of school staff this year—an on-site, after-school weight-loss program has helped staff get in shape.

"January is such a perfect time to begin a weight-loss group," says ninth grade special ed teacher Myrna Thumher. "So when our vice principal asked if we were interested in forming one last January, I jumped on the idea immediately."

Since then, Thumher, pictured front, second from left, and 17 colleagues have met every Friday after school to weigh in, learn weight-loss strategies, and support one another's progress. Diet talk now dominates lunch-time conversations in the staff lounge.

"I hadn't really run or dieted in a couple of years," says Thumher, who has been spurred on to dieting by others in the group and a firm resolve that "I needed to do something for me."

Thumher has lost 25 pounds since she started in the program. Personal commitment is certainly critical to dieting success, she says, but enlisting practical support from others is equally important.

"I haven't had to do it alone," Thumher points out. "I talked to everyone and asked for help."

Thumher's friends run with her at school and on neighborhood streets. She has instructed her husband not to buy chocolates on Valentine's Day. And her students remind her to fill her ever-present water bottle during the day if they see it empty.

Of the original members of Thumher's weight-loss group, a third met their lifetime weight loss goals during the year. One added benefit: Thumher's husband, who helped her

Paul Tañedo

train, lost 20 pounds to boot.

Thumher, 53, has literally gone the extra mile in her shape-up effort.

When a group member challenged Thumher to train for and race two high-profile marathons, Thumher did so—raising $3,500 for the Leukemia Society in a June Rock and Roll Marathon in San Diego and finishing the 26.2 mile Marine Corps Marathon in just under six hours.

"As teachers, we tend to lose sight of our own needs and put everyone else's first," says Thumher, who notes that losing weight and feeling fit need to be moved closer to the top of educators' must-do lists.

Easy Steps

Have a New Year's resolution that includes "losing weight"? Try high school teacher Myrna Thumher's 10 tips for dieting success.

1. Set small goals. Calculate 10 percent of the weight you want to lose and focus on reaching that interim goal a bit at a time.

2. Be prepared. If you're starting a new program, read materials thoroughly, and load your fridge and cupboards with good-for-you foods you can eat.

3. Out of sight, out of mind. Keep food triggers out of easy reach by packing them up and putting them elsewhere.

4. Seek variety. Purchase cookbooks, try new low-fat recipes, and exchange ideas with other dieters.

5. Don't skip meals. Instead, eat smaller portions to avoid becoming overly hungry.

6. Get moving. Take steps instead of elevators. Park the farthest space away from entrances. Fifteen minutes of activity a day makes a difference.

7. Make H_2O a habit. Carry drinking water around with you all the time, even at bedtime.

8. Enlist support. Find cheerleaders whom you can depend on to encourage you and share your success.

9. Communicate needs. Donuts in the break room? In-laws forcing dessert? Share your goals with coworkers and family and politely ask that they not sabotage your plans.

10. Reward success. Treat yourself to a movie. Indulge in a manicure. Avoid rewarding yourself with food that can add unwanted pounds. ✔

Quick Tips

Kim Fischer

"When in training, make sure you've got room in your shoes. Feet—especially a new runner's feet—grow. Buy comfortable shoes, opting large, if you can. Luckily, my shoes and I squeaked by when I grew a half size. Wish I could say the same for my favorite black pumps.

"Some runs will be great and some will be awful. Do them anyway. If you're consistent, you'll improve.

"Enlist a friend. Going through an event like a triathlon alone—especially for first-timers like me—makes it especially scary. Even swapping stories is valuable. You'll probably need to talk about the good days and the sore calves more than your family needs to listen to you."

—**Kim Fischer**, eighth grade English teacher, McKinley Middle School, Kenosha, Wisconsin, competed in her first Mrs. T Sprint Triathlon (half-mile swim, 15-mile bike ride, and 5K run) last August.

NEA HIN

From the **NEA Health Information Network**

■ Sexual Health

The NEA Health Information Network has just released *Sexual Health: The Role of School Personnel*, a two-sided fact sheet that provides a concise overview of the role school personnel play in the sexual health of their students. It explains why sexual health is an issue for all educators and highlights important statistics and key strategies for school staff to incorporate into their classrooms and schools. Copies of the free fact sheet can be ordered online at www.neahin.org or by calling NEA HIN's automated hotline at 800/718-8387.

■ Assault Prevention

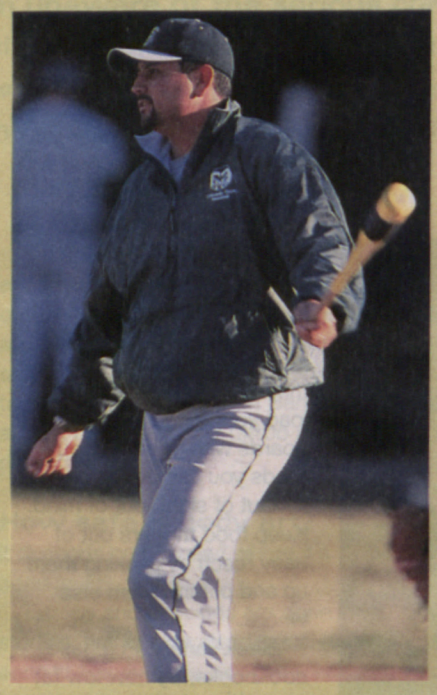
***Drawing the Line: A Guide to Developing Effective Sexual Assault Prevention Programs for Middle School Students* offers practical information about the characteristics of promising programs. The guide discusses dealing with disclosures of abuse, taking an age-based approach to devising curriculums, and avoiding program implementation pitfalls. This 55-page resource, published by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists as part of its National Rape and Sexual Assault Prevention Project, is free. To order, visit www.acog.org.**

■ STD Prevention

The National STD and AIDS Hotlines Classroom Calls Program, a free and confidential service, gives students and educators an opportunity to ask tough questions about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases in their own classroom, through speakerphone. The service is available anywhere in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the Virgin Islands and can be conducted in English, Spanish, or TTY for the deaf or hard of hearing. For more information, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National STD and AIDS Hotlines at 800/342-2437 or 800/227-8922. The toll-free hotlines are also available 24/7 for one-on-one callers to discuss HIV- and STD-related questions and concerns.

'Detoured' by the Major Leagues

A lifelong dream of becoming a teacher comes true for a big league baseball player.



Little boys grow up wanting to play big league baseball. Colorado teacher **Frank Gonzales** grew up wanting to be a teacher, but took a detour into the major leagues. Now he's fulfilling his original dream.

"My goal was always to be the first in my family to graduate from college, and then go back to my high school as a teacher and baseball coach," says the first-year teacher. "The major leagues kind of took me off course."

Gonzales now works with English-as-a-Second-Language students at Lincoln Junior High School in Fort Collins and also serves as head baseball coach at Colorado State.

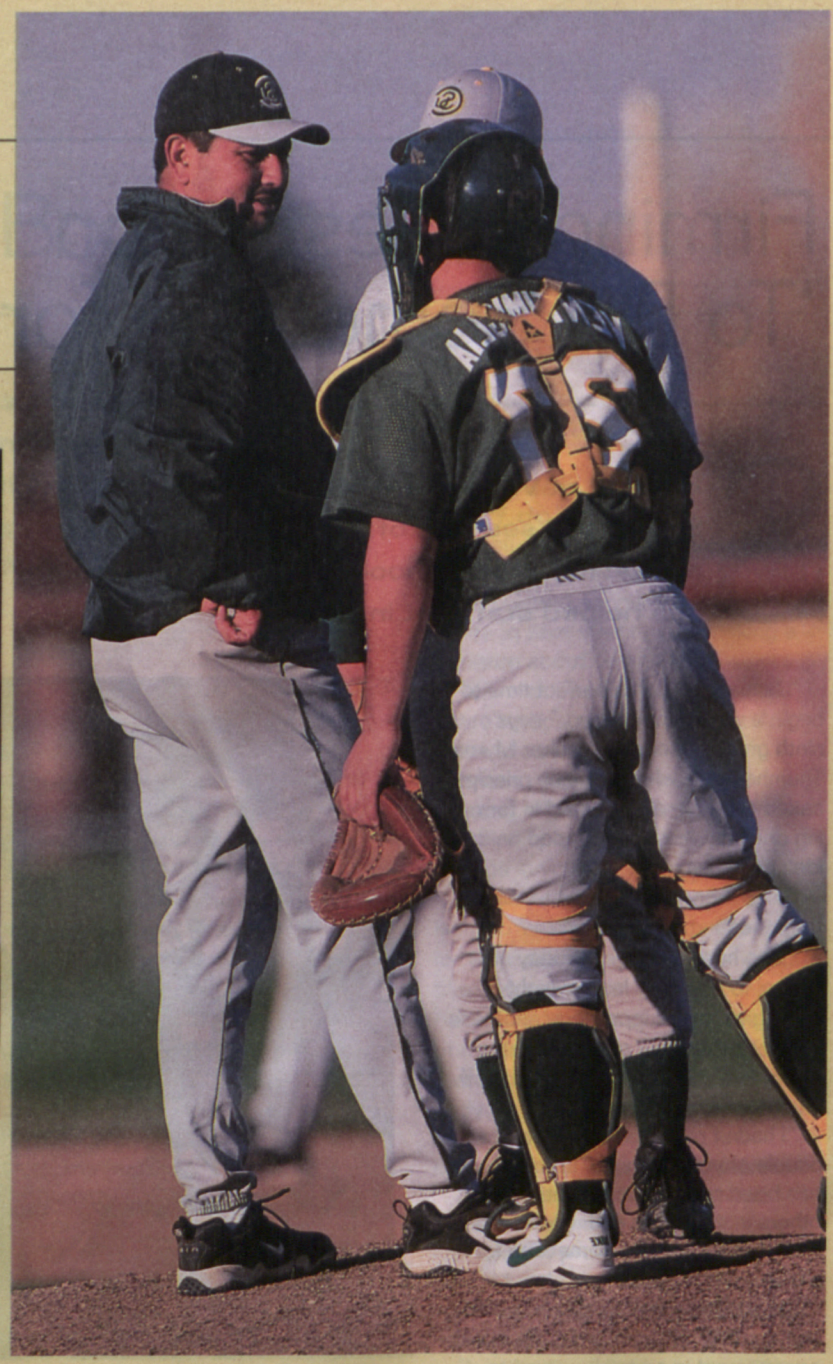
The Detroit Tigers drafted Gonzales out of Colorado State in 1989. He went on to play for 11 years in the major and minor leagues with the Tigers, the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, and Pittsburgh Pirates. He also spent one year playing international baseball in Taiwan.

"We've been around the world," says Gonzales, who has been married for 12 years and has two children. "In 12 seasons, we had 32 addresses in eight countries, including a stint in South America where I played summer ball."

Adds Gonzales: "It was an amazing experience, but when Colorado State called and asked if I would coach, I knew it was time to go home and pursue my original goal."

With the help of a scholarship, Gonzales finished college and started teaching at Lincoln—where, he says, most of his students aren't fazed by his former career.

"I'm their teacher, and I think that's what they respect," he says. "The players on my team at CSU, on the other hand, want to know all about Chipper Jones, Derek Jeter, and the other guys I came through the leagues with that are big now. I tell them they are just 'regular guys'—like me." ✔



Photos by David Zalubowski

Stories by Dina S. Gómez

Rachelle Ormenson

For the Love of Music

Most people dread the thought of a 500-person wedding guest list. But **Catherine Witkowski,** a school secretary at Richard E. Byrd Elementary in Glen Rock, New Jersey, is hoping at least that many show up at her June nuptials. After all, more people means more money—for the local symphony, that is.Witkowski, who moonlights as general manager for the local 100-person, all-volunteer Ridgewood Symphony, and her beau of seven years, a symphony musician, are tying the knot during a concert that will feature traditional wedding music. They're holding the wedding in a local school and expect most of the guests to be students, educators, and parents from her district.

"We wanted to do something different," says Witkowski. "It just seemed natural to have our wedding during a concert—and to have it be a fundraiser, too. We hope everyone will show up, if only because it's a free hour of great music. But we also hope people will be inspired to make a donation to the symphony in our honor."

Part of that donated money will be used to help fund Witkowski's real passion, "Project Symphony," an outreach effort she organizes to bring symphony musicians to local schools. Last year, the symphony performed at six schools. This year three schools, including her own, are on the schedule.

"Lots of people tell me what a special thing I'm doing by helping to bring music to children," says this Association activist. "But I really don't think it's that extraordinary. I love my school job. And I love the symphony. It seems only natural to want to combine the two." ✔

Toward a Safe Haven

Tired of the violence in the community surrounding her school, Nashville, Tennessee, elementary teacher **Lisa Jones** fought back.

Teaming with colleague **Melanie Ricks,** Jones enlisted the help of Tim Chavez, a local newspaper columnist who agreed to publicize the plight and peril of children living in the inner-city.

Within weeks of the first article, Nashville residents were offering help. That prompted Jones to start Project SAVE (Students and Teachers Against Violent Environments).

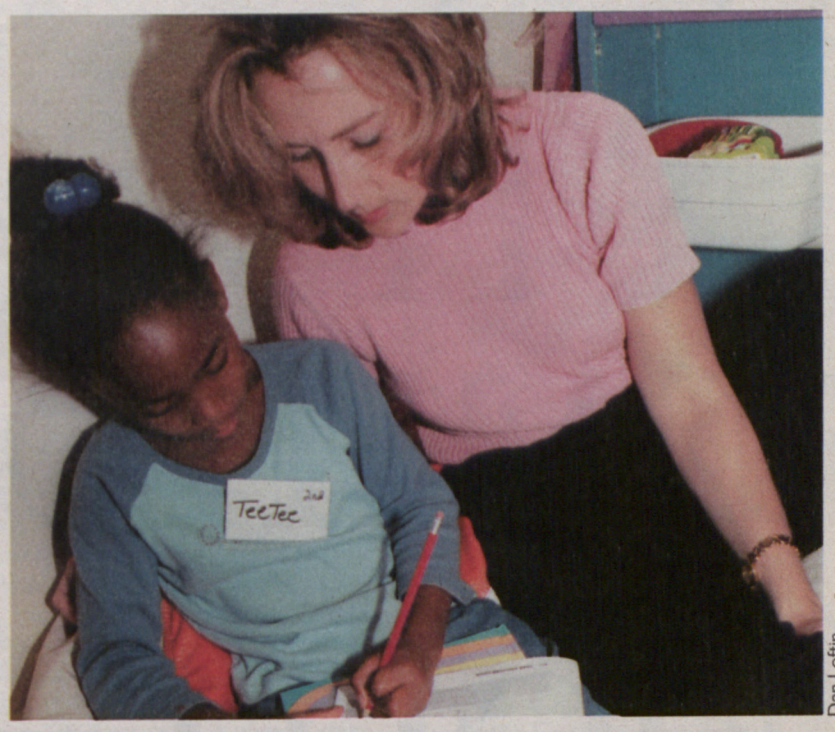
Today, the project is thriving. A Vanderbilt University psychologist gives free monthly workshops to both parents and teachers about topics like discipline. A suburban Optimist Club donates gun trigger locks, which have already gone to more than 300 inner-city families. Local restaurants have opened their doors to once "troubled" teens, who now are learning on-the-job skills.

And local police and community leaders are helping residents form neighborhood watch groups.

The SAVE centerpiece is an Enrichment Center.

"The mayor donated an apartment right in the projects that we use as a community center," says Jones. "We're paying mothers to come in and work with other mothers on their parenting skills. We also have books, computers, games, and puzzles for the kids."

"Whatever it takes," adds Jones, "We're going to make this work." ✔



Dan Loftin

For a Good Cause

Want to know how to get free money? Talk to **Janet Muller,** a third grade teacher at Duniway Elementary School in Portland, Oregon. Over the past 12 years, she has brought in nearly $100,000 for her students, classroom, and school.

"When I became a teacher, I immediately set a professional goal to earn $100,000 in grants by the time I retired," she says.

Still years away from retirement, Muller is just shy of that six-figure mark, having won more than 60 contests, grants, and awards. Most recently, she was named Educator of the Year by *Time Magazine for Kids* and Chevrolet, an honor that came with a $2,500 cash prize, as well as a new car, pictured above.

"My classroom is crammed with hands-on learning tools that I've been able to purchase with my winnings," says Muller, referring to the 11 animals, some exotic, that call her classroom home.

Her room also features an active volcano model, a planetarium, working robots, and replicas of animal skulls, including one from the Kenya Museum of Natural History.

"My children don't just learn, they actually feel and see," Muller says. "Their enthusiasm and excitement for learning is what motivates me to keep seeking out this money. I want to give everything back to them."

Muller spends substantial time every day combing the Internet and teacher publications for cash-based awards. Many organizations, she feels, want to give teachers money.

"Don't let a rejection shake you," advises Muller. "Keep trying." ✔

Remembering the Real Titans

The highly acclaimed movie, "Remember the Titans," released last fall, is not just about football.

"If you want to see a football game, this film isn't for you," says **Herman Boone,** the retired T.C. Williams High School teacher and coach whose real-life story is brought alive by Denzel Washington. "It's about people coming together in spite of racial differences. It is an inspirational story about what we can overcome."

The movie focuses on events back in 1971, when Boone, pictured below with Washington, was appointed head football coach over a popular white coach in the newly integrated Alexandria, Virginia, school system.

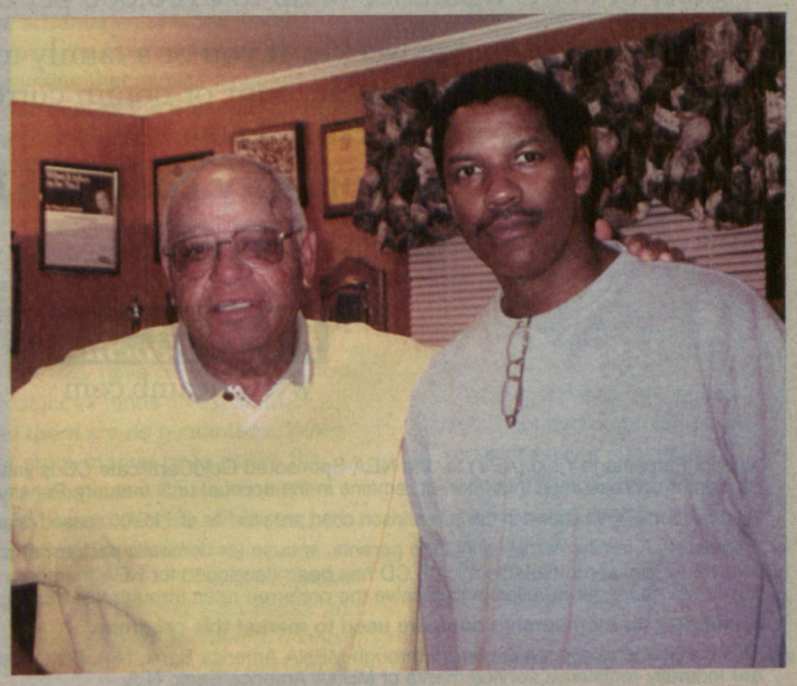
"I was too Black for the white kids and not Black enough for the Black kids," Boone recalls. "The community was in upheaval because of the integration. It was just a mess."

Despite the odds, Boone—with the help of assistant Bill Yoast, the white coach he displaced as head coach—led the team to an undefeated season and helped unite a community that was pulling apart at the seams.

"Those kids, who had little experience with other races and religions, came together as a team," says Boone, who spent significant time consulting with actors on the movie set.

Today, NEA member Boone still substitutes at T.C. Williams, and his former players—including nearly 65 from his 1971 team who showed up in black-tie at the Washington, D.C., movie premiere—bring their own children to meet him.

"They tell their kids, 'This is the man that changed daddy's life,'" he says with emotion. "I can't tell you how gratifying that is." ✔



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Have I Missed the Boat? and Other Stock Market Concerns

Q: Should I jump in?

A: That's the question I got recently from a new investor. He wanted to know whether I thought it was too late for him to get into the stock market. He said that while he was doing his research, the market skyrocketed. "I'm really frightened to pull the trigger and jump in," he said. "I get the feeling that I missed the boat."

It's never too late to get into the stock market. The stock market will likely be going up and down and up and down for decades. But it always moves in a generally higher direction if you're willing to ride out those bumps.

Yet I'm concerned about this particular investor jumping into the market, chiefly because of the way his question is worded. He says that he's really frightened to pull the trigger and that he gets the feeling he's missed the boat. That's a very dangerous way to feel as an investor, dangerous because it might mean you don't have the staying power necessary to succeed.

Regret plays a powerful role in investment decisions. Lots of studies have been done on regret. We know, for instance, how people regret near misses.

Meir Statman, a professor at Santa Clara University, talks about a case where two travelers miss their planes, one by a matter of minutes, one by an hour. The traveler who misses his plane by minutes is far more miserable, even though their situation is exactly the same: They're both stuck in the airport terminal.

Studies also show that people regret losing money more than they regret missing an opportunity. That often means they decide not to take a risk and not to invest in stocks.

As investors, we have to recognize regret for what it is and put it aside. No looking over your shoulder and second guessing your decisions.

The goal of a beginning investor should be to get a good return and learn how to deal with the market's volatility. The other choice is to put your money in the bank.

There is a second important decision for a skittish new investor to make, though, and that is to decide whether to dump in a lump sum or move in gradually using a strategy called dollar-cost averaging, which means investing regular amounts of money in a stock or mutual fund every month or every quarter.

Lots of studies have been done on dollar-cost averaging v. lump sum investing. To sum them up, they show that because the market goes up more than it goes down, investors who dump in the lump sum get invested earlier and they do better over time.

But roughly 30 percent of the time the lump summers lose money in the short term. For that reason, financial planners typically use dollar-cost averaging for new clients. It reduces the risk. And that can be important.

Thrifty Educator

This month's tips come from Carol Johnston, a third grade teacher at Perry Elementary School in Perry, Ohio, and Sheri Radovich, a third grade teacher in the Granite School District in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Johnston: "At the beginning of each school year, I take a single digital picture of each child and save it to disk. Throughout the year I use Picture-it 2.0 to make many projects. For example, we make framed birthday pictures, note cards for parents' gifts, calendars, and autobiographies. I can use the digital pictures over and over. It saves on film and the cost to develop the pictures."

Radovich: "I send postcards to students and their families to mark birthdays, offer get-well messages, and thank them for gifts. I found I could make the postcards myself. I take birthday and thank you cards and cut off the inside greeting. I then add a dividing line vertically down the back of the card and write the address on the right side with a stamp and my message on the left."

If you have a favorite money-saving tip that you apply in your workplace, send your idea along to neatoday@nea.org.

Q: What's the best financial resolution to make for the new year?

A: Resolve that you will make peace with your money, that you will figure out how to be comfortable with it. That means setting priorities to accomplish your most important goals, giving what you can, and enjoying what you spend on yourself, too.

I moderate an online newsgroup where I see hundreds of questions every month. Some who write in don't believe they make enough or they think someone else makes too much or they want their spouse to stop dribbling away so much of it.

I sense that lots of people do battle every day with their money. It's not because they don't have enough money. It's because they don't know what they want their money to buy. Sometimes it's because they're consumed by regret that they didn't make different financial choices.

Clearing all this away and coming to terms with what we have and at the same time always reaching for what more we can learn and achieve and contribute is a good life's work.

Q: Is an index stock fund the safest investment?

A: I see this question frequently. The answer is no.

I suppose people have picked up that idea, because there's been so much talk over recent years about the advantages of index funds.

An index fund contains a mix of securities that mimics a market index such as the Standard & Poor's Index of 500 Stocks. Because it holds securities in the same relative weightings as the index and trades infrequently, expenses are low. In a good index fund, returns parallel the market. They work well for beginners, because there is no portfolio manager to monitor.

But they have disadvantages, too. Most index funds invest in stocks, and there are no guarantees. When the stock market goes down, the fund goes down. "Safe" is not a word I would choose. Perhaps "practical" or "efficient."

—Mary Rowland

Rowland is an author and contributor to several financial planning magazines.

Steven Parrish

800,000 visits have been recorded on the NEA Member Benefits Web site, www.neamb.com.

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

NEA members now have a significant new resource. NEA Member Benefits and Nolo.com recently signed an agreement to allow the use of Nolo.com's consumer, financial, and legal articles on the NEA Member Benefits Web site at www.neamb.com.

Nolo.com, founded in 1971, provides easy-to-use self-help legal books for the general public. The leading publisher of such material, Nolo now offers software products that range from "WillMaker" and "Living TrustMaker" to "Personal Recordkeeper."

In addition, Nolo offers a wide variety of paperback books on consumer and financial concerns.

Nolo's dozens of titles include *Plan Your Estate*, $27.95 (30 percent off for NEA members), *IRA's, 401(k)'s and Other Retirement Plans: Taking Your Money Out*, $17.47 (30 percent off), and *Social Security, Medicare and Pensions: Get the Most Out of Your Retirement and Medical Benefits*, $17.47 (30 percent off).

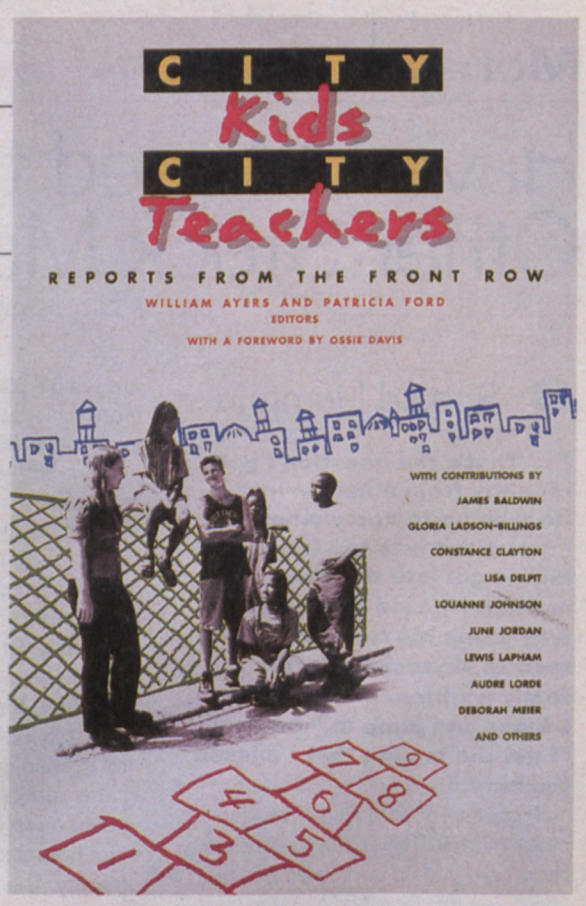
These prices are valid when you purchase online. You can also buy Nolo's books from bookstores at retail prices.

Nolo.com publications also cover wills and estate planning, eldercare, real estate, landlords and tenants, debt, credit and bankruptcy, taxes, consumer issues, personal injury, courts and mediation, marriage and living together, and child care.

NEA members can access Nolo.com and purchase books and software at substantial savings through the NEA Member Benefits Web site at www.neamb.com.

Just use the Search button and keyword Nolo.com.

Understanding Urban Schools



What does it mean if a child is 'at risk'? Twenty-five educators dispel myths about city kids and schools.

CITY KIDS, CITY TEACHERS: REPORTS FROM THE FRONT ROW
Edited by **William Ayers** and **Patricia Ford**
The New Press, $25

Have you been to the Grand Canyon? If you have, you may remember the feeling of burning anticipation you had before casting your eyes downward, for the very first time, on the extraordinary vision below.

A writer once suggested that it's impossible for visitors to truly "see" the Grand Canyon, as it actually is, because their minds are burdened with preconceived notions derived from slick magazine advertisements, postcards, and travel brochures.

In their anthology *City Kids, City Teachers: Reports from the Front Row,* editors William Ayers and Patricia Ford convincingly argue that the same could be said of inner-city, minority children.

For decades, sociologists, policymakers, and the media have routinely and indiscriminately labeled inner-city children "at-risk."

The practice is so prevalent that most adults who have bought into the negative advertising see so-called at-risk kids only in terms of problems such as drug abuse and violence.

The premise behind this extraordinary and inspirational book is that we need to break down these preconceived notions about inner-city kids.

By compiling 25 provocative essays by such leading educators and writers as Deborah Meier, James Baldwin, and Lisa Delpit, the book's editors hope to explode a variety of stereotypical visions.

Some contributors to the book tell real stories about themselves. Other authors criticize policy or plead for better programs.

The book, in short, is part diary, part policy, and part education textbook. You'll feel sad, angry, hopeful, agitated, and inspired—all in one sitting—as every page delivers a new understanding and a new emotion.

In Part One of the book, titled "City Kids," we see through the eyes of children, as they passionately share their own stories about growing up in the city.

We meet bright students turned away from college-preparatory work in high school by teachers and counselors.

We meet children who are searching for their own understanding of race, ability, and self-identity; who dare to question the validity of standardized tests and structured school days; who painfully address their own portrayal in the media.

"The media says we have no ambition and will never amount to anything," writes one frustrated high school senior. "It's wrong for them to twist facts and transform them into vile lies. It's wrong for them to trample the hopes of a child who lives in the projects."

In the book's second section, "City Issues," we're taken through a series of thoughtful commentaries about some of the most critical issues facing urban educators: language, race, class, culture, violence, and poverty. We travel from the aftermath of the 1996 Los Angeles riots to the pedagogy of poverty, from issues of bilingual education to the realities behind "Black English."

In Part Three, which is titled "City Teachers," we are introduced to educators who have implemented culturally relevant teaching strategies that inspire their students to achieve beyond everyone's expectations.

We hear from city teachers, in their own voices, about classroom life and about all the countless frustrations and joys that come with their "calling."

We are also given a glimpse into the real story behind Hollywood's portrayal of city teachers. We see those on-screen practitioners of tough love who, tragically, do so little to encourage their students to reflect on the society that has shaped their lives. ✔

—Dina S. Gómez

EXCERPT

"I saw a television program some years ago where the interviewer asked some high school dropouts, seventeen or eighteen years old, whether they knew anyone who had ever graduated from college. These three dropouts said no. I thought, what an odd thing to say. They had been in school for almost twelve years, and had had somewhere between twelve and fifty teachers, all of whom had graduated from college. On the other hand, this was not a strange statement at all. The youth did not include any of those teachers among the people they knew because they did not know their teachers."

—Deborah Meier, from *City Kids, City Teachers*

BOOKS by NEA Members

Girl in Hyacinth Blue
By Susan Vreeland
A compilation of eight independent stories woven together, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* travels back in time to chronicle the history of an art piece. Recounting the lives of the painting's owners, Vreeland offers insight into the human spirit. $17.50 plus $4.20 s&h from MacMurray & Beck, 4101 E. Louisiana Ave., Suite 100, Denver, CO 80246, 800/774-3777. On the Web at www.macmurraybeck.com/girl.htm.

Going Beyond Duck, Duck, Goose
By Cary Pyle
Going Beyond Duck, Duck, Goose presents several entertaining activities for children ages 5-10. Realizing the time and resource constraints placed on teachers and recreation leaders, Pyle lists games that require a minimal amount of preparation. $10 (includes s&h) from Formula Marketing, 726 West Kalmia St., San Diego, CA 92101, 800/533-5111. On the Web at http://www.formulamkt.com/Pyle.htm.

Who Was the Scottish Medieval Knight, Prince Henry Sinclair?
By Elaine Sinclair Fowler
A product of personal genealogical research, Fowler's illustrated children's book, *Who Was the Scottish Medieval Knight, Prince Henry Sinclair?*, reveals that a European visited North America before Christopher Columbus. $7 (includes s&h) from Lake Champlain Islands Publishing Co., P.O. Box 11, South Hero, VT 05486, 802/372-4557.

Simple Hands-On Science
By Greg Bartram and Lois Belavich-Ivanc
In Simple Hands-On Science, authors Bartram and Belavich-Ivanc offer a slew of hands-on experiments that demonstrate concepts in earth and life sciences. Designed "for teachers, by teachers," each activity requires simple materials and minimal preparation. $16 (includes s&h) from NDT, inc., 4 E. 194th St., Euclid, OH 44119, 216/531-1591. On the Web at www.ndteachers.com.

FREE OR INEXPENSIVE

Nature Lovers

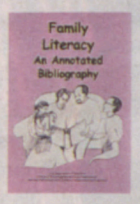
Anita Holmes has come out with a fun new set of books for students in grades K-2. *We Can Read About Nature* is a six-book series filled with colorful pictures and interesting information about numerous different plants, animals, and insects. Each book begins with a list of words to look for within the text and ends with a short phonics lesson, fun facts, and a glossary/index. These books are designed especially for beginning readers. $89.70 for six-book-set, $14.95 for individual books from Marshall Cavendish Corporation, www.marshallcavendish.com, 800/821-9881.

Education Leadership

From the archives of Phi Delta Kappa International comes this collection of readings addressing timeless thoughts on leadership in education. *Readings on Leadership in Education* features 14 essays, including a discussion about "Empowering Teachers as Learners and Leaders" by former NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell. 165pp., $220 plus $3.00 s&h from the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 800/766-1156.

Teens Challenge The Law

On issues ranging from privacy, free speech, and dress codes to drug testing and sexual harassment, teens across the nation have taken action against what they believed to be violations of their constitutional rights. In *Teens on Trial*, readers can learn about courts and the Constitution and how to do legal research, while studying the successes and failures of teens who have forced local, state, and federal courts to take their complaints seriously. 197pp., $14.95 plus $4.95 s&h from Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com, 800/735-7323.



Family Literacy

Learn how to find more about literacy theory, policy, and research with *Family Literacy: An Annotated Bibliography.* This extensive list of writings and research covers conceptual issues in family literacy, program studies, program practices, development and assessment, and curriculum instruction. Offered free from the U.S. Department of Education. To order call 877/4ED-PUBS or write: U.S. Department of Education, ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398.

Remembering Christa McAuliffe

A Journal for Christa is an intimate look at the life of Christa McAuliffe, the nation's first teacher astronaut. Told by her mother, Grace George Corrigan, this is a story of a courageous woman with a sensitive spirit who was given the opportunity of a lifetime. As a representative of mothers, teachers, and citizens across the nation, her death affected millions. 191pp., $14.95 plus $4 s&h from the University of Nebraska Press, 800/755-1105. www.nebraskapress.unl.edu.

Also just out: Teacher in Space, *by Colin Burgess, which recounts the events leading up to the launch. 98pp. $24.95 plus $4 s&h from the University of Nebraska press.*

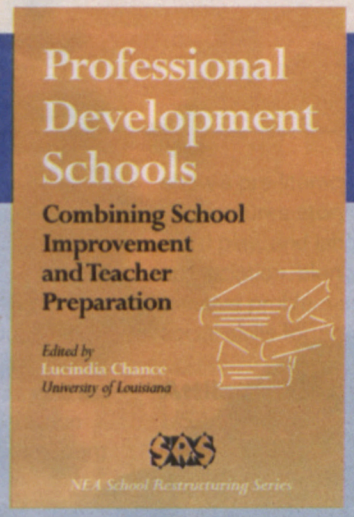
Uncommon Champions

By Marty Kaminsky

Looking to instill a sense of hope in America's youth, Kaminsky chronicles the lives of 15 athletes who overcame adversity to achieve their goals. *Uncommon Champions* provides motivating insights that remind readers that athletics is not just about physical strength. $14.95 plus $4.95 s&h from Boyds Mills Press, 815 Church St., Honesdale, PA 18431, 877/512-8366.

Teaching Tolerance

The Southern Poverty Law Center offers free resources to help teach students tolerance. One example, "Responding to Hate at School," a 64-page guide to dealing with prejudice and bias. Also free: poster sets, video-and-text kits, and magazines. Go to www.splcenter.org/teaching-tolerance/tt-index.html or call 334/264-0286.184 pp., $9.95, from NTC/Contemporary Publishing Group, Lincolnwood, IL, 847-679-5500.



NEW from the NEA Professional Library

Professional Development Schools: Combining School Improvement and Teacher Preparation
Lucindia Chance, Editor
160 pp., $18.85 #2017-0-00-FN

This book helps educators turn their learning workplace into a successful "professional development school," or "PDS." Learn how to develop effective relationships with universities. Explore the roles and responsibilities of teachers, student teachers, paraeducators, and higher education faculty in the professional development school framework. See how you and your colleagues can evaluate the effectiveness of a PDS program. A must read for any educator concerned with professional development or considering whether to try to establish a PDS.

To order, call toll-free 800/229-4200, or check the Web at www.nea.org/books.

EXCERPT

Real empowerment related to decision-making is more than participation in teacher committees that advise the principal; in real empowerment, teachers make decisions affecting not only their own classrooms and schools, but also their districts and state. Some decision-making opportunities at the school level that can contribute to school improvement planning and enhance teacher empowerment are: (1) developing alternative assessment programs, (2) selecting textbooks and curriculum approaches that are developmentally appropriate, and (3) sharing in personnel and budget decisions.

TVTIPS

Les Miserables

Fox Family, January 7, 7:00-11:00 p.m. ET, check local listings.

Set in 19th-century France, this presentation features Gerard Depardieu and John Malkovich in an original production of Victor Hugo's classic novel. Depardieu plays the peasant Jean Valjean, who serves jail time for petty theft and then reinvents himself as a successful businessman, finding redemption through his kind and just treatment of others. But Police Inspector Javert, played by Malkovich, believes that criminals are incurable and tries time and again, through the years, to ensnare and reincarcerate Valjean. ✔

LIFE

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TV TIPS

The Weather Classroom: Hurricanes

The Weather Channel, Mondays and Thursdays through January 11, 4:00-4:30 a.m. ET, check local listings.
This new installment of *The Weather Classroom* explores the power of hurricanes through the experiences of experts. Viewers learn how the intensity of a storm is measured and what it's like to fly into the eye of a hurricane. *The Weather Classroom* is aired commercial-free with closed captioning and taping rights for educators. Support materials are available at www.weather.com/education.

Jazz

PBS, beginning January 8, check local listings.
Filmmaker Ken Burns highlights America's quintessential art form in this 10-part series. The program traces the growth and development of jazz, with all its social significance, from beginnings in New Orleans to reinvigoration at the end of the century. *Jazz* uses interviews, music, archival film clips, and photographs to capture the rich history of this musical form. A companion book by Geoffrey C. Ward and corresponding CDs will accompany the series, along with a Web site at www.pbs.org/jazz.

Freedom Never Dies: The Legacy of Harry T. Moore

PBS, January 12, 9:00-10:30 p.m. ET, check local listings.
This documentary looks at the life and death of Harry T. Moore, an early civil rights activist during the postwar years who championed equal pay for Black teachers, organized Black voters, and publicly condemned the racist actions of local and state officials in Mims, Florida. In 1951, Mr. Moore and his wife, Harriette, were killed in their bed by a bomb. President Truman ordered a full investigation by the FBI, but their murders remain unsolved.

The Great Gatsby

A&E, January 14, 8:00-10:00 p.m., check local listings.
In this original adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, Mira Sorvino plays Daisy Buchanan, the epitome of beauty, wealth, and class in the 1920s. Jay Gatsby is the newly rich suitor who's determined to win her away from her cruel but very rich husband. *The Great Gatsby* captures the decadence of the Jazz Age and America's obsession with wealth, ambition, and the ability to reinvent oneself. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Great American Dreamer*, will air January 19 on A&E Classroom, and support materials can be found at www.AandE.com/class.

Inside the Kill Box: Fighting the Gulf War

Discovery Channel, January 14, 9:00-11:00 p.m. ET, check local listings.
Ten years after the United States launched an attack on Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait, politicians, soldiers, and historians still debate the conduct and goals of the Gulf War. This program examines the methods and motives of the war and its impact on American military personnel and the people of Kuwait and Iraq. Former President George Bush, Dick Cheney, and General Norman Schwarzkopf are featured, along with soldiers, pilots, and Iraqi military officials.

Crosses on the Lawn

Fox Family, January 15, 4:00-5:00 a.m. ET, check local listings.

The town of Springdale has been hit hard by economic loss, but when a large corporation arrives with the promise of jobs, things seem to be improving. Then, when it's revealed that one-quarter of the jobs will be set aside for minorities moving into Springdale, the mood shifts: Residents must now deal with racial hatred, and how they respond offers important lessons about bias, prejudice, and tolerance. KIDSNET has produced an online study guide for middle school educators, as well as a bulletin board discussion forum. Visit www.kidsnet.org for more information.

CNN Newsroom: To Serve a Nation

CNN, January 17, 4:30-5:00 a.m. ET, check local listings.
CNN Newsroom goes to boot camp in this special on military service. Tom Haynes investigates the four main branches of the military and the strict training endured by recruits. Military careers are profiled, and Haynes looks at how the armed services can help to instill responsibility, teamwork, and a sense of service in young people. For more information, or to receive classroom guides and programming information by E-mail, log on to www.turnerlearning.com.

Lizzie McGuire

Disney Channel, January 19, check local listings.
This new series combines animation with live-action to provide an inside look at the life and stresses of a 13-year-old girl. The live-action Lizzie may look calm, or perhaps simply stunned, but her animated counterpart fully expresses the highlights, pain, and humor of a typical teenage girl.

The Book of Pooh

Disney Channel, weekday mornings, check local listings.

Using "Bunraku," the 300-year-old art of Indonesian puppetry, this new series brings A.A. Milne's beloved stuffed animals to life. The show's pre-literacy foundation features storytelling, word play, and language appreciation, along with creative problem-solving and social skills for preschoolers.

Attila the Hun

USA Network, January 30 and 31, 9:00-11:00 p.m. ET, check local listings.

Filmed on location in Lithuania, this original presentation tells the story of what happened when the worlds of Attila, king of the Huns, and Roman General Flavius Aetius collided. Attila envisioned an empire and the possibility of a new world order that would supersede the power of Rome. Aetius, raised as a royal hostage by the Huns, learned from them the art of war and combined that art with Roman infantry tactics. When these leaders and their armies met near Chalons, France, in 451, they fought until the Huns, vanquished, fled under the cover of night. But because the losses were so great on both sides, the Romans could not pursue Attila, who escaped.

KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., provides these listings. For additional listings and information, check the Web at www.kidsnet.org.

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Some 120 short stories by the likes of Chekhov, Gorky, Ambrose Bierce, and Kipling are only the latest additions in an expanded *Bibliomania*. You'll find hundreds of other searchable, full-text works of classic and pop fiction, drama, poetry, dictionaries, research, and religious texts. www.bibliomania.com/.

Blacks in Aviation And Aerospace

Provide your students with a visual overview of the contributions that African Americans have made to aviation history. This collection of eight 17" x 22" posters highlights the achievements of flyers ranging from the Tuskegee Airmen, who never lost a bomber in 200 escort missions over Europe in WWII, to Frederick Gregory, the first Black astronaut to command a space shuttle. $25 (includes s&h) from Black Books Plus, 670 West End Ave., Suite 8A, New York, NY 10025, 212/579-0689.

Inside the Box

Given the increasing need to produce technologically literate students, the Intel Corporation has created a kit to help teachers give students an idea of what's happening inside their computers. In "The Journey Inside," Intel provides a comprehensive package that aims to teach students the science behind computer technology. The kit, which includes a video, teacher's guide, and an actual microprocessor, is available for science, math, or computer teachers in grades five through nine. The package is available free of charge by calling Intel at 800/346-3029.

'Sound' Experiments

Help students explore the wonders of sound with *The Science of Sound and Music*. Using everyday materials, authors Shar Levin and Leslie Johnstone provide fun and interesting experiments that explain what makes sound and how it's measured. Students can gain an understanding of pitch using a bicycle, clothespin, and a baseball card, or unravel the mysteries of "stringed" instruments by constructing a guitar out of a box and rubberbands. $19.95 plus $5 s&h from Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. To order, call 1-800-367-9692 or visit www.sterlingpub.com.

Eating Healthy

Motivate students to eat their fruits and vegetables through this free CD-ROM introduced by the Dole Food Company. In its latest edition, the "5 A Day Adventures" program both educates and entertains elementary school students. Bobby Banana and his cast of friends escort students through the world of nutrition, which includes songs, games, and graphics about

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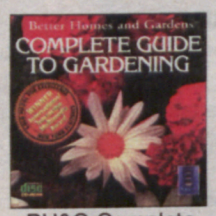

BH&G Complete Guide To Gardening*

Decorating Your Home*

Leap Ahead! Preschool*

Leap Ahead! Kindergarten*

Leap Ahead! 1st Grade*

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Physician's Home Assistant*

Cook it Light

Joy of Cooking

PhotoFinish

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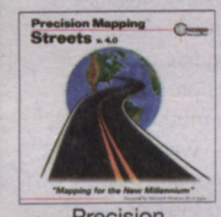
Encyclopedia of Space and the Universe



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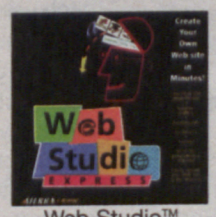
Ultimate Family Tree



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System Requirements: PC with 486dx66cMHz or better processor. 8MB of RAM. Double speed CD-ROM drive. VGA 640x480 monitor displaying 256 colors. MS-DOS 5.0 or later. Microsoft Windows 3.1 or later. Stereo headphones or speakers. Mouse or compatible pointing device. 16-bit sound card (100%) SoundBlaster compatible. VGA video card recommended. Minimum 12MB of free hard disk space required. Macintosh: Performa 575 or better. 13" monitor (640x480) 12 MB RAM, system 7.1 or better 2x CD-ROM. All brand or product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders.

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healthy lifestyle. For more information, visit the Dole 5 A Day Web site at www.dole5aday.com/school/SCHOOLS.html.

Under the Sea

Uncover the underwater world with this free CD-ROM designed by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The CD offers students an introduction to oceanography and marine biology. Virtual explorers will be taken along for a ride across the ocean floor, learning about different ocean systems and processes on the way. Useful for any science teacher in middle or high school, the "Visit to an Ocean Planet" CD-ROM is only one part of a software series that the Jet Propulsion Laboratory produces. Visit JPL online at http://topex-www.jpl.nasa.gov/education/cdrom.html for more information.

Learn to Make Informed Financial Decisions

The *Jump $tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy* seeks to improve the personal financial literacy of young adults by disseminating important information on curriculum, research, legislation, and training. Subscription $8. For more: www.jumpstart.org or call 888-45-EDUCATE.

Critical and Creative Thinking Skills

You can help develop your students' intellectual gifts by asking effective questions that spark the imagination

and sharpen thinking skills. *Gifted & Talented Questions & Answers Super Edition* from Lowell House Juvenile Publishing does just that for children age 6 to 8. Included are approximately 150 questions on a variety of subjects ranging from animals and science to nature, the human body, and more. A series of six follow-up questions for each main question works to develop such children's thinking skills as recall, inference, deduction, and creative problem solving. 184 pp., $9.95, from NTC/Contemporary Publishing Group, Lincolnwood, IL, phone 847-679-5500.

Introduce the United Nations to Your 7-Year-Old

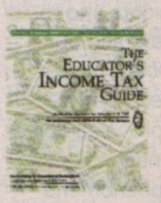
The United Nations, Come Along with Me! introduces children age 7 and 8 to the concept of the United Nations and its humanitarian work throughout the world. The book is written by Nane Annan, wife of Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi

Annan, and depicts her travels, experiences, and projects devoted to the alleviation of poverty. The book is illustrated with photos of children and UN sites. Profits will be donated to UNICEF. 33 pp., $7 plus 10 percent s&h; minimum $5, from the American Forum, 120 Wall Street, #2600, New York, NY 10005, phone 212-624-1300.

Learning Through Laughter

Studies show that students learn better—and remember more—when they're taught with humor. Author Ron Burgess shows how teachers can "lighten up" in the classroom in his book *Laughing Lessons: 149 2/3 Ways to Make Teaching and Learning Fun.* Even humor-impaired teachers can capitalize on their students' eagerness to learn through their natural love of laughter. $21.95 plus $4.95 s&h through Free Spirit Publishing Inc. To order call 612/338-2068, E-mail: help4kids@freespirit.com or visit the associated Web site at www.freespirit.com.

That Time Again



The Educator's Tax Guide offers teachers and other school employees practicaladvice on preparing year 2000 tax returns. To order:www.ttstaxguide.com. Also check the NEA Professional Library Web site this winter for the latest edition of NEA's free tax-planning advice. See www.nea.org/books.

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Launched in 1990, the Hubble Space Telescope has been taking pictures of the universal expanse, giving scientists marvelous insights into the birth of the stars and our universe. *Hubble Space Telescope: New Views of the Universe* provides down-to-earth explanations of astronomical phenomena through the use of breathtaking images from the telescope. A sampling is available online at www.stsci.edu. $19.95 plus s&h from Harry N. Abrams, 100 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011, 800/759-0190.

Alice Walker: In Class

English teacher and NEA member Carol Jago has put together *Alice Walker in the Classroom*, a handy guide

for bringing the work of this noted author into the classroom. The book includes biographical information, ideas for literature circles using Walker's short stories, sample lessons using Walker's poems, and other resources. Companion to *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*. Order from the National Council of Teachers of English at 1/800-369-6283 or on the Web at www.ncte.org.

Fabulous Feet and Crazy Teeth

Have you ever realized the amazing ways animals use their feet and teeth? Author Diane Swanson explores the phenomenon of feet and teeth in her Up Close series, *Feet That Suck and Feed* and *Teeth That Stab and Grind*. From feeding and leaping to grabbing and grinding, discover animals from around the world that have all different kinds of feet and teeth. $5.95 each plus $5 s&h from Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. To order call 1-800-367-9692 or visit www.sterlingpub.com.

Reaching the Middle Kids

Here's a valuable resource about an age-old topic: how to better understand and educate middle schoolers. Higher education professors Trudy Knowles and Dave Brown (a former middle and high school teacher) have written a book with practical advice combined with research to help middle school educators more effectively connect with their students. $16 from Heinemann books. Order from www.heinemann.com or call 1/800-793-2154.

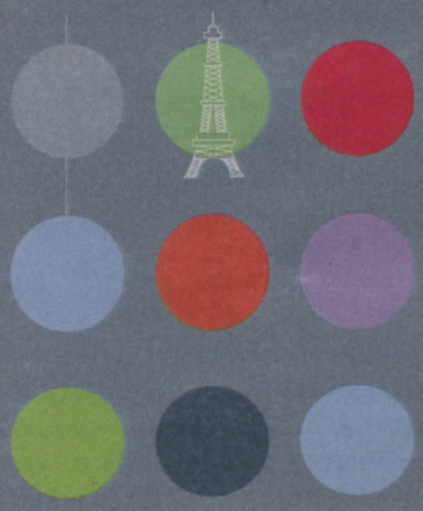
WEB WINNERS

Scoop from the Soviets

The fall of the Soviet Empire led to an explosion of news about the region, and NewsLine keeps us informed. This is a free daily report based on news gathered by the correspondents, services, and regional specialists of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. www.rferl.org/newsline.

Family/SchoolConnections Resource

Disney Learning Partnership launches this new resource area containing information on how educators and family members can work together to help children succeed in school. Offers instructions for teachers on how to create interactive homework



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that involves parents in the learning process. Gives parents advice on getting involved with their child's learning. Includes The Teacher's View, a monthly in-depth look at how a teacher works to involve families in the classroom. For more, www.DisneyLearning.org.

Running Scoop

Are you sick of hearing manufacturers claim that their product is the *best* of the *best*? Now there's a place to go to find the latest

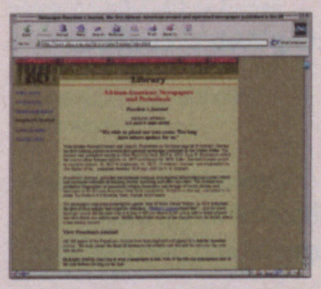
non-biased information for runners. Realrunner.com boasts that it's an independent site not linked to any manufacturer or race organizer, "so the content on the site is guaranteed to be free from bias that you'd get otherwise." Aimed at the global running community, whether you're just starting out or an expert. www.realrunner.com.

Healthy Meals

Are you eating healthy? The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued its *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000, 5th Edition*. This link also lists recipes for thrifty meals and an Interactive Healthy Eating Index. www.usda.gov/cnpp/.

Mars Mania

Take your students on an interplanetary journey with pictures of Mars that have



been acquired by NASA's Global Surveyor. More than 25,000 images in all from three cameras that give us narrow, wide, and global angles. www.msss.com/moc_gallery/.

Famous Words

From Pablo Picasso and Albert Einstein to Rene Descartes and Thomas Jefferson, Gabriel Robins, Walter N. Munster associate professor of computer science at the University of Virginia, has tapped into his literary side. His Good Quotations by Famous People is a great site to tap into the minds of history's greatest thinkers. http://www.cs.virginia.edu/~robins/quotes.html.

Animal Habits

Ever wonder what those critters outside your house were? These local guides from eNature give you a list of wildlife common to your area. Complement a lesson on insects and animals with photos and descriptive text from the National Audubon Society Field Guide series. www.enature.com/.

Freedom First

A historical treasure goes digital: The first 20 issues of *Freedom's Journal*, the first African-American owned and operated newspaper published in the United States, are now online. Brought to us by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. www.shsw.wisc.edu/ library/aanp/freedom/index.html/.

Something Old

From his *Anatomy of the Human Body*, Henry Gray has made studying the human body fun and easy. More than 1,200 engravings—many in color—from the classic, now-digitized 1918 publication. www.bartleby.com/107/.

How Schools Stack Up

How does your school match up with the latest reports on the health of our schools? *The Condition of Education* report profiles America's educational system, displaying trends and monitoring important developments. In an Adobe Acrobat format for easy reading. http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2000062.

Real Leaders

Women who strive to make America a better place are, of course, fearless. Let it be known that these are amazing women who won't take no for an answer. Update yourself on who these women are and what they are doing at befearless.com. www.befearless.com/.

Museum Online

Take your students on a virtual trip to Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. See Rembrandt's etchings, work by

Albrecht Durer, and many other amazing pieces of art. This virtual tour is well worth the price of admission (a mouse click). http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/.

Internet Public Library

This vast online library, created and maintained by librarians, sports a youth division with a treasure trove of information—links from sites as obvious as Yahoo and as obscure as that of a New Jersey elementary school's geometry class. www.ipl.org/youth.

National Geographic's Map Machine

Give your child the cartographer's challenge of making flat maps for a round planet. Or scan the night sky with views from the Hubble Space Telescope. www.nationalgeographic.com/maps/.

Seniornet

Rich and easy to use, this site for older folks covers everything from hobbies to investing. Its information about senior discounts and online classes is especially helpful. You can talk with your peers about politics, literature, and anything else. www.seniornet.com/.

Look for Law Day 2001

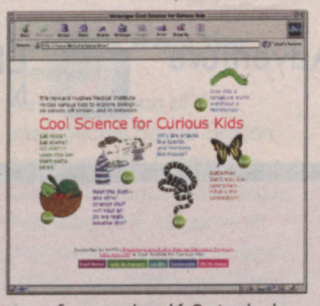
"Celebrate Your Freedom—Protecting the Best Interests of Our Children" is the theme for Law Day 2001. On May 1, the American Bar Association will celebrate its 100-year endeavor to address the needs of children and their unique status within the legal system. Every year many legal and non-legal organizations, state and local bars, businesses, and schools join the ABA in conducting thousands of programs on how the rule of law makes our democracy possible. Learn more information on how you can participate by visiting the ABA Law Day Web site: www.lawday.org.

Science News

Uncover the origins of the first known evidence of life on earth. Read about the final space walk and the first jetpack testing by the crew of the space ship Discovery. Learn how one wild teacher motivated his students to learn physics through the use of a first-hand lesson on lightning. You can do all this and more though the ABC news Web page science link. This site is packed with exciting information useful for designing up-to-date lessons in science. Decide for yourself and visit www.abcnews.go.com/sections/science/DyeHard/dyehard.html.

Cool Science

These guys took some of the best projects from the best museums in the country and adapted them for the Web. These simple activi-



ties, for grades K-3, include classifying animals, learning where butterflies come from, and finding out what kinds of particles are hiding in your nose. www.hhmi.org/coolscience/.

Portal to the World Of Knowledge

This Internet distance learning Web site offers educational opportunities for everyone from preschoolers to corporate executives. The site has won 18 awards as outstanding distance education Web site and *USA Today* names it the "best bet" education site. www.educating.net/.

History of Physics

You don't need an advanced degree to learn about the history of physics. This site from the American Institute of Physics offers an Exhibit Hall packed with topics ranging from the discovery of the electron to the life of Albert Einstein. www.aip.org/history/.

Definitely In the Pink Study Site

An online study buddy, Pink Monkey, combines 314 literature summaries (at last count), 1,800 classic texts, and online SAT prep. Not to mention current college planning advice, plus creative study tips, and a jamming radio. All free. www.pinkmonkey.com/.

This is the Real X-Files

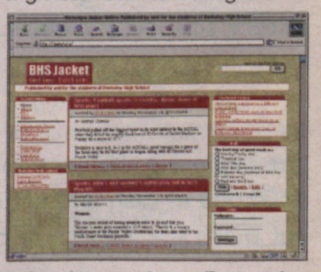
Wonder whether UFOs are fact or fiction? Dig into the Popular Documents Collection of the CIA's online reading room to find the spy set's official report on the matter. Everybody convinced now? www.foia.ucia.gov/.

Learn a New Language or Several Languages

Over 70 languages to choose from, travlang's travel and language site provides translating dictionaries in many languages—free. Learn a new word every day in 70 different languages via the web. Check out the currency exchange rate and a worldwide hotel database. www.travlang.com/.

The Journalists of Berkeley High

This high school newspaper is filled with sophisticated feature stories that set high standards for high



school journalism. Recently, the journal received national recognition with its groundbreaking story uncovering the carbon-monoxide poisoning death of a 17-year-old Indian Immigrant in the Bay area, an indentured servant to a local real estate tycoon. Read *The Jacket* online at jacket.org.

LYCOS

CYBERSURFARI

CyberSurfari is brought to you by The Children's Web Surfing Alliance, a nonprofit 501-C3 educational organization, and these generous sponsors:

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Hitch Your Horse to the CyberSurfari Wagon — It's Free and Lots of Fun

The object of the game is to collect as many points as possible by solving clues linked to a variety of fun and interesting Web sites about history, science, art, music, animals, sports and much more.

Gold Rush of Prizes

Just exploring the sites and solving the clues is like striking gold. But as you play, you'll also be eligible to win your share of more than $100,000 in cash and prizes including frisbees, totebags, online certificates, and tshirts. Finishing the contest takes diligence and perseverance but there are nuggets of recognition at 10, 25, 50, 75, 90, and 100 clues.

Sign-up, Practice and Play

You can sign-up as an individual player, or ask your teacher to sign-up teams to play the game as a school activity. Although registration is required, we collect only the information needed to distribute prizes and give you credit for your hard work. Saddle up today...the Summer contest is available until October 15th for practice.

For more details, saunter over to http://www.cybersurfari.org or contact Katy Mason at kmason@cybersurfari.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Best Fiction

Highlights for Children announces its 22nd annual fiction contest and begins accepting submissions in January. This year's contest seeks sports stories for children. The contest is open to anyone interested in writing for children, and each of three winners will receive $1,000. Contest guidelines state all entries must be postmarked between January 1 and February 28, 2001. For guidelines and additional information, write Fiction Contest, Highlights for Children, 803 Church Street, Honesdale, PA 18431, or E-mail: Highlights@ezaccess.net.

Summer Institute for Educators

The National Archives and Records Administration announces its 22nd annual institute for educators to be held at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland on June 25-July 3, 2001. Primarily Teaching: Original Documents and Classroom Strategies provides access to the rich resources of the National Archives for teachers at the upper elementary, secondary, and college levels. Learn how to research the historical records, create classroom materials on the records, and present documents in ways that sharpen students' skills and enthusiasm for history, government, and other humanities. The cost of the institute, including all materials, is $100. Contact the Education Staff, NWE, National Archives, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740 or E-mail education@arch1.nara.gov. Applications are available online at www.nara.gov/education.

ThinkQuest Junior

The nonprofit ThinkQuest, Inc. announces The ThinkQuest Junior competition for the 2000-2001 school year. ThinkQuest Junior is a competitive event that challenges fourth through sixth graders to create an in-depth Web site on a particular subject for the Internet. Winners of the contest will win a portion of the $250,000 available for cash awards. Applications are available online at www.thinkquest.org/tqjr/index.html. For more information, call 914/765-1134 or visit www.thinkquest.org.

RespecTeen Winners

RespecTeen encourages teens to take part in the political process through a comprehensive curriculum that culminates in writing letters to their representatives. A panel will judge the letters, and state winners will be flown to Washington, D.C. to take part in a forum and meet their congressional representatives. RespecTeen competition winners from last year include students of NEA members Helen Gammill (Arkansas), Gary Miller (Colorado), Stacy Bender (Oregon), Rita Tamalavadge (Pennsylvania), Kathryn Taylor (Virginia), and Melanie Boyes (Wyoming). More information is available on the RespecTeen Web site at www.respecteen.org.

Sex Education Report Released

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation released its report on sex education in September, revealing that there are gaps between what parents want their students to learn in schools and what schools are actually teaching. According to the report, parents would like schools to go beyond the basics and cover controversial issues, including abortion and sexual orientation.The report also shows that parents would like more practical skills to be taught, including communication and coping techniques. A summary of the report is available at www.kff.org, or by calling the Foundation at 800/656-4533.

Teachers, Parents Get Help From Software Ratings

With a Federal Trade Commission study revealing that movie, music, and electronic-game industries employ "pervasive and aggressive marketing" to sell violent materials to children, parents and teachers are asked to observe the ratings system provided by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). Similar in structure to the ratings system for movies, the ESRB ratings not only provide age ranges, but also content descriptors. The rating is indicated on the front of the box, with further information listed on the back, if necessary. The review board, which began rating in 1994, has examined over 7,000 products. More information is available on the ESRB's Web site at www.esrb.com.

DIVERSITY Calendar

March

March 21 Noruz
Noruz is the celebration of the Iranian New Year on the first day of spring, recognizing the rebirth of nature with rituals practiced for more than 3,000 years. They begin two weeks before spring with the germinating of seeds and traditional cleaning and decorating of homes. Many rituals focus on the concepts of good/evil, beginning/end.

March 31 César Chávez
Birthday of César Chávez. Born in 1927, he died April 23, 1993. César Estrada Chávez led the first successful farm workers' union in U.S. history, the United Farm Workers (UFW) of America. Beginning in 1962, Chávez and the UFW followed the principles of nonviolence practiced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1968 he fasted for 25 days to reaffirm the UFW's commitment to non-violence; in 1988 he led a 36-day "Fast for Life" to protest the pesticide poisoning of grape workers and their families. More than 40,000 people attended his funeral.

April

April 8 Buddha's Birthday
Buddha's Birthday is the most important of Buddhist holidays. Ceremonies include offering of flowers, burning of incense, and bathing statues of baby Buddha with ladles of sweet tea. Buddhism teaches its followers to improve their human characteristics in order to attain enlightenment (Nirvana). Many Buddhist adherents have combined the teachings of the Buddha with local religious rituals, beliefs, and customs, because Buddhism at its core is a philosophical system to which such additions can be grafted.

April 19-28 Passover
Pesach, or Passover (Jewish), celebrates the delivery of Jews from Egyptian slavery. Traditional Seder ceremony takes place in homes during the first two evenings and commemorates the historical ideal of freedom during the entire eight-day period. The unleavened bread (matzo) eaten during the eight days symbolizes the fact that Jews had to leave Egypt in a hurry and did not have time to let their bread rise. Many Jews refrain from eating leavened bread (bread, rolls, pasta) for the entire holiday period.

Celebs Back Anti-Drug Efforts

Pop music stars Britney Spears and N'Sync are among the celebrities helping launch the NO-ADdiction Campaign. Now in its third year, the NO-ADdiction program aims to decrease teen drug and alcohol use. High school students are invited to take part in the program's essay contest.

Ten student winners can win $1,000 college scholarships, by noting their extracurricular activities, demonstrating leadership skills, and submitting an essay that details the students' efforts to prevent drug and alcohol use in their school and community.

In addition, high schools are eligible to win $5,000 and the distinction of being "America's Drug and Alcohol-Free School of the Year." Schools will be judged on existing drug and alcohol use prevention programs currently in place.

Each school is allowed to nominate one student for the student competition. Application materials are due to NO-ADdiction by April 27th, 2001. More information is available by calling 800/622-3342 or by E-mailing noad@aol.com.

Lessons from the Heavens

As construction of the International Space Station continues, the Discovery Channel School is offering a free teacher's resource kit that focuses on space exploration. "Countdown to the Space Station" looks into all facets of space life, including eating in outer space, dealing with weightlessness, and the physics of a rocket launch.

The kit also includes a video that ties into a curriculum guide, which also is included. The video describes the history of space exploration, the international cooperation that is required to construct the space station, and other topics related to the exploration of the universe. The Discovery Channel is targeting middle school science classes.

To order the complete kit, call 888/892-3484.

World War II Contest

Kindergarteners through sixth graders are invited to submit entries in a multimedia contest designed to call attention to the impact of World War II.

Individual schools are asked to select one finalist from each grade and submit their entries to Macmillan/McGraw Hill by February 1, 2001.

The winners will attend an award ceremony on May 1, 2001 at The National D-Day Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana. Contest winners will receive a $2,000 scholarship and a commemorative plaque. Macmillan/McGraw-Hill will also award each winner's school a $1,000 book certificate to the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Catalog and a plaque. Educators or students should call 866/321-6548 or E-mail WWIIwriting contest@mcgraw-hill.com.

Essay Contests

The Ayn Rand Institute announces the opening of its 2001 essay contests, which will award 502 cash prizes totaling $62,000. Top prize of $10,000 will be awarded to the Fountainhead winner and $2,000 to the Anthem winner. Both contests are designed to promote students' critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Deadline for entries is April 16 and April 2, respectively. For complete contest details go to: www.aynrand.org/contests.

in the Light Lane

Presidential Perception

Teaching a class of eighth graders about the Constitution and the qualifications for the Presidency, I happened to mention that no person can be elected to the highest office in the land who is not a natural born citizen.

One young lady raised her hand immediately and inquired if someone delivered by Caesarian section could be elected.

Jeff Pearlman
Revere, Massachusetts

This is my first year teaching second grade after decades in the upper grades. Second-graders' lack of vocabulary, I've found, is made up in imagination.

One day, doing phonics, the double "e" came up. I used the word "cheese." I asked what types of cheese students knew about, and I got the usual answers—pizza cheese, cheddar, Swiss, American.

Then one child said, "Line cheese." I had never heard of this cheese and said so. Then another student piped up: "Oh, he means string cheese, Ms. Lucas."

Diane Lucas
Cathedral City, California

During a vocabulary test one of my 10th graders quickly finished his test and turned his in first. I started to grade his test while the other students completed their quizzes. I was pleased to see that he had matched all of the words with the correct definitions.

The students were then supposed to pick five of the words and use them in a sentence. I burst out laughing when I read his sentence for one of the words he picked.

"Amazement," he had written. "In the bottom of my house is an amazement."

Karey Howell
Lakewood, Washington

I was teaching my second graders about digraphs: ch, sh, th, wh. The students were eagerly giving examples of words that had these digraphs in them.

The "wh" took them a while, so I started their thinking with words like "whale," "what," until a boy raised his hand and proudly stated, "Whassup!!!"

Kimberly Zeller
Manitowoc, Wisconsin

My fourth grade students keep a binder for notes that are related to their independent reading. The cover sheet lists "title of book," "genre," and "date completed."

One of my students is an avid reader, but he often seems foggy on details and instructions given out in class. I was looking through his binder and noticed that there was a column on his first page, after the book titles, that read "male" and "female."

Perplexed, I asked, "Ian, what is this?"

"Well," he responded, "you know, if it's a boy or a girl."

When I regained my composure I asked, "So how did you determine the gender of your books?"

"I used the authors' names, " he replied promptly, "but sometimes it was hard to tell."

Julie Drew
Evanston, Illinois

I was chatting with my high school English class just before the period ended. I was wearing my college letterman's jacket, which was embroidered with the school name and the year I graduated (80).

A student in the front row asked, "What's the '80' for?"

I puffed out my chest and said with feigned arrogance, "Well, you see, when you're in college they embroider the number of girlfriends you had on your jacket."

A voice piped up from the back of the room, "So, what's the eight for?"

Frank Kovac
South Lake Tahoe, California

In my U.S. history class, I asked one girl if she remembered one of the nicknames the colonists gave to the British soldiers. She piped up and blurted, "Red lobster!"

I smiled and said, "I'm sorry; that's the name of a restaurant." We all enjoyed a good laugh. The answer I was looking for was either "redcoats" or "lobster backs."

Gerald Lunderville
Long Beach, California

My eighth grade English students were taking their weekly vocabulary quiz.

One of the extra credit questions on the quiz was, "What is the noun form of the word romantic?" (The answer is "romance.") One student gave it a shot and answered "Romeo and Juliet!"

Lynne Dennis
Ellington, Connecticut

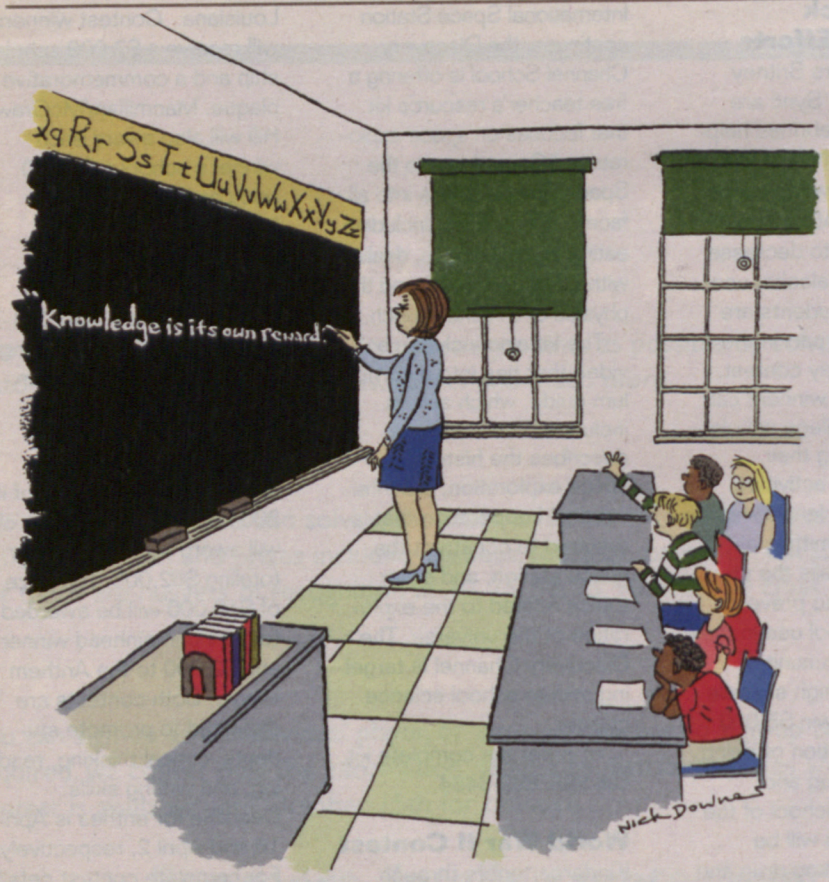
For "Back to School Night," my students wrote letters to their parents.

Students wrote about classes, fellow students, and teachers.

I had to laugh when I read one student's letter.

"My social studies teacher is cool, he's really young," he had written. "Now, for English. My English teacher is a regular teacher and you know how they can sometimes be!"

Linda Brach
Doylestown, Pennsylvania



"Will this be on the test?"

Our Ancestors

During our "Discovery Time" one afternoon, I was monitoring my first grade students and overheard a conversation about ancestry.

One little girl told the others in her group that she was part Hawaiian.

Another girl said that she was half German. Finally, one boy shared his family history with the group. "I'm very lucky," he said. "I'm a quarter leprechaun! My family's from Ireland!"

Christina Andersen
Torrance, California

While teaching about the United States government, we had spent extensive time and energy drawing trees as graphic organizers.

The students named the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government, and explored the role of each branch.

To review the previous day's lesson, I asked my fifth graders who could name the three branches of the government.

One of my students eagerly answered, "The three branches are the legislative, the executable, and the jewishable."

Angel Gasior
Baltimore, Maryland

Our textbook described "conscience" as "the inner voice of reason telling you what is right and wrong."

When the test question asked, "What is the inner voice of reason telling you what is right and wrong?," one student promptly wrote, "My mother."

Mary Ann McGinley
Wilmette, Illinois

Got Laughs?

● Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane," NEA Today, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Fax: 202/822-7206. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

● Want a classroom chuckle delivered to your E-mail box once a week? Subscribe to the new "In the Light Lane" mailing list. Just send an E-mail to join-lightlane@list.nea.org (no subject or message needed).

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ROSEBUDS

Project ROSEBUDS

Project ROSEBUDS is a new service learning organization offering two innovative programs to NEA teachers and their classrooms: **Cancer Rose of Hope** and **Salute to Hospitalized Veterans.**

Both programs offer a teachers kit including: a classroom lesson plan, materials for creating silk rose or ribbon pins, and a written language activity allowing students to write messages of hope. Both kits come with suggestions for offering the assembled pins and messages of hope to local cancer or veterans' organizations and will be ready in time for Valentine's Day 2001.

For more information, contact **Project ROSEBUDS** at USAROSEBUDS@chicago.avenew.com
www.usarosebuds.com

New Partnership for Older Women's Health

Women today can expect to live as much as one-third of their lives beyond menopause—the milestone that marks the end of their reproductive years. The changes that occur in a woman's body after menopause can increase the risk of getting some diseases, and other diseases just occur more often in older women. Learn more about menopause and other important women's health issues from the Partnership for Post-Menopausal Women's Health.
www.womensorganizations.org

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Signature

X *Signature Date

* I have read this application and everything I have stated in it is true. My signature means that I agree to the conditions described below and will be bound by each of the terms of the Credit Card Agreement, including arbitration. MBNA America Bank, N.A. (MBNA) is authorized to check my credit, employment history or any other information and to report to others such information and credit experience with me. If I do not qualify for the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, I will automatically be considered for the NEA School Days account. I understand that the acceptance or use of any card issued will be subject to the terms of this application and the Credit Card Agreement that will be sent with the card, and agree to be responsible for all charges incurred according to such terms. I am at least 18 years of age and a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident of the U.S. or Puerto Rico. By signing this application, I certify that I am an NEA member or part of an NEA member's family. I consent to and authorize MBNA America Bank, N.A. and MBNA's affiliates to monitor and/or record my telephone conversations with their representatives or the representatives of any of those companies. I accept that MBNA may, at its discretion, periodically consider any account for an automatic upgrade. **Information about me or my account may be shared among MBNA Corp. and its subsidiaries for marketing or administrative purposes. I may prohibit such sharing of information, other than information pertaining solely to transactions or experiences between me and MBNA (or its subsidiaries), by writing to MBNA at P.O. Box 15342, Wilmington, DE 19850 and including my name, address, home phone number and the applicable MBNA account number(s).**

Request for additional card

Name of Authorized User	Relationship

†The current promotional offer for cash advance check and balance transfer transactions made with either account is 2.9% through your first four statement closing dates, commencing the month after your account is opened. When the promotional offer expires, the APR that will be applied to all new and outstanding cash advance balances (consisting of cash advance check and balance transfer transactions) will be 15.99% for the NEA *Platinum Plus* account or 16.99% for the NEA School Days account. **MBNA will allocate your payments to balances (including new transactions) with lower APRs before balances with higher APRs. Cash advances and/or balance transfers may not be used to pay down or pay off any MBNA® account. Cash advances obtained through a Bank or ATM transaction are not eligible for the promotional 2.9% APR offer. The non-promotional APR for your account is not guaranteed and is subject to change.**

‡Certain restrictions apply to this benefit and others, as described in the benefits brochures which are sent soon after your account is opened. NEA School Days Card customer benefits differ from those available with the NEA *Platinum Plus* account, e.g., year-end summary of charges is available upon request; MasterPurchase Protection is not available and maximum Common Carrier Travel Accident Insurance coverage is up to $500,000; Credit lines run from $500 to $5,000, while *Platinum Plus* credit lines are from $5,500 to $100,000.

†Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for Purchases	The current promotional APR offer for purchases made with either the NEA *Platinum Plus* or NEA School Days credit card account is 2.9% through your first four statement closing dates, commencing the month after your account is opened. When the promotional offer expires, the APR that will be applied to new and outstanding purchase balances will be 15.99% for the NEA *Platinum Plus* account or 16.99% for the NEA School Days account.
Annual Fee	None.
Grace Period for Repayment of Balances for Purchases	At least 25 days from statement closing date.
Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases	Average daily balance (including new transactions).
Transaction Fee for Purchases	Transaction fee for the purchase of wire transfers, money orders, bets, lottery tickets, and casino gaming chips: 2% of each such purchase; $2 minimum, $10 maximum.
Transaction Fee for Cash Advances and Fees for Paying Late or Exceeding the Credit Limit	Transaction fee for Bank and ATM cash advances: 2% of each cash advance; $2 minimum, $10 maximum. Transaction fee for credit card cash advance checks and balance transfers: 1% of each cash advance; $2 minimum, $10 maximum. Late Payment Fee: $25.Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee: $25.

The NEA is not involved in the credit decision process; standard credit procedure is followed. All applications will be subject to a confidential standard review by MBNA America. Absolutely NO membership dues are used to market this program. MBNA America Bank, N.A. is the exclusive issuer and administrator of the *Platinum Plus* credit card program.
The NEA Credit Card Program® has been developed for NEA members and their families only. If a member decides not to renew membership, that person and his/her family will no longer be eligible to receive the preferred rates, fees and special promotions offered through the NEA Credit Card Program. If eligible, a replacement card will be offered. Any account opened in response to this offer will be governed by the laws of Delaware.
The information about the costs of the card described in this application was accurate as of 11/00. The information may have changed after that date. To find out what may have changed, please call (888) 758-7946. TTY users please call (800) 833-6262.
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